St. Columba's Episcopal Church
October 11, 2026 – The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
The Care for Creation Examen
The Parable of the Wedding Banquet - Matthew 22:1-14
The Rev. Dr. Susan Kraus

We have honored God's good creation on the last five Sundays, the Season of Creation. This is Indigenous Peoples Weekend, and since indigenous people are often better at creation care than others, I thought it was appropriate to continue the emphasis on creation this week. Before I speak about the parable we just heard, I want to draw your attention to the back of your service leaflets where you will see "The Care for Creation Examen." I hope you will take these leaflets home with you and try using the Examen. There are also some copies of the Examen on the table in the narthex.

An "examen" is a practice created by St. Ignatius of Loyola, the 16th century founder of the Jesuits. It is a method of reviewing each day, at the end of the day, following a basic five-step form, as you see in this example. The emphasis is on God's activity and guidance in one's daily life, and the focus of this one is on God, the created world, this time of environmental crisis, and our responses. I hope you might find this a helpful way to connect your spiritual life with the choices you make in your daily lives.

Today's reading from Matthew's Gospel, the Parable of the Wedding Banquet, is the third of a set of parables that Jesus told to the religious authorities in Jerusalem shortly before his crucifixion. This parable is an allegory, and to understand its meaning we need to do some "translating" of terms. The king is God, and God's invitation to the wedding banquet is an invitation to join the community of the kingdom of God. The first group of people invited to the banquet are the Jews, the people of Israel, and the slaves sent to them are the Jewish prophets. Through the prophets God called the people more than once, but the people would not come. They would not honor the covenant God had made with them, to follow the Commandments of God. Some of them mistreated and killed the prophets. Jerusalem, God's holy city, had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BCE, and in Jesus' day its destruction was viewed as God's retribution for the people's disobedience.

The king then invited everyone to the banquet. This second group of people called to the banquet are the community of the followers of Jesus. God expands the mission field to include everyone, including the Gentiles or non-Jewish people. The wedding hall is the church, comprised of both Jewish and non-Jewish believers in Matthew's day, and comprised of both good and bad people, in Matthew's day and our own.

Let's go back in the parable and look at the responses of some of the people who refused to attend God's banquet, a sumptuous banquet with fatted calves. The people "made light of [the invitation] and went away, one to his farm, another to his business." These people failed to take God's invitation seriously, to understand its importance. So, they went to work. They didn't go off, like the younger son in The Parable of the Prodigal Son, to waste themselves and their resources in "riotous living." They went to work. Nothing wrong with that, except that they wasted the opportunity God had offered them. They took themselves out of the wedding hall by their own choice and missed the sumptuous banquet. Jesus teaches over and over again that answering the call to the kingdom of God is more important than anything else.

What about the guest who was not wearing a wedding robe? The king's anger seems excessive. We need to understand that this isn't about being casually dressed at a formal party.

The wedding robe stands for membership in the community of the kingdom of God. We need to understand this at its deepest level. In this parable wearing the wedding robe means transformation into God's own likeness, clothing oneself with the compassion, kindness, humility, and patience that are the traits of people who belong to God's kingdom. The garment here is not an outward garment that can be put on and taken off, like the vestments we wear during our worship services. The wedding robe is an outward sign of the person within – a person fit for the kingdom of God or not.

The last line of this morning's lesson has been interpreted in several ways. "For many are called, but few are chosen." In the history of the church Calvinists have used this verse to support the theological concept of predestination. Simply put, this means that God has decided ahead of time who will and who will not be saved. This is <u>not</u> what we believe in the Episcopal Church. I am convinced, given all of Jesus' teaching as well as the witness of much of the rest of Holy Scripture, that the sense of this verse in Matthew might be clearer if the verse read, "For many are called, but few answer the call." "For many are called, but few answer the call."

We are here in the church because we have received an invitation from God, an invitation to follow Jesus and be part of a community of people fit for the kingdom of God. How will we reply to God's invitation, as individuals and as a parish?

Let's imagine for a moment that God's invitation has just arrived. Each one of us has just received a beautiful card in the mail at home. It reads, "God invites you to follow Jesus as you live each day of the rest of your life. If, with all your heart, you choose to accept this invitation, your days may not be free of trouble, but you will know love, joy, and a peace which only God can give. You will find time to help your neighbors, to pray for them, and to work with others who have accepted God's invitation to assist the poor and needy. You will grow in compassion and generosity and gentleness. The light of Christ will surround you, and at the end of your life on earth, you will be with God forever. R.S.V.P. at your earliest convenience."

And what if another beautiful card came to St. Columba's, addressed to all our members. It reads, "All of you have received a personal invitation from God. If you were able to say "yes" to that invitation, God now invites you to join with others who have said "yes" to God's invitation, to meet together, to pray together, to help one another, to follow Jesus, to decide how to do what he would like you to do. With this invitation comes God's promise to help you and guide you and strengthen you, so that this group might be like no other group you belong to. R.S.V.P. at your earliest convenience."

God has issued these invitations, not by engraved cards through the U.S. mail. But often and in many ways, God invites each of us and all of us. God invites us every Sunday morning as we join in the Eucharist. The invitation is serious, not something to make light of and go away to our work and other activities.

Each time we say "yes" to God – each time we listen for the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit and follow her guidance; each time we choose to love in spite of the temptation to be indifferent or contemptuous or mean; each time we ask our Lord to guide us and we follow him – each time we say "yes" to God in any of the innumerable opportunities offered to us, we are working on that beautiful wedding robe God has asked us to create, according to God's own design. Shall we get to work? For deep in our souls, don't we long, more than all else, to be welcomed guests at the wedding banquet of the Lord? Amen.