

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

R.S.V.P.

Matthew 22:1-14

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost Analysis by Marcus Felde

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: 2The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. 3He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. 4Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.' 5But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, 6while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. 7The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. 8Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' 10Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, 12and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless. 13Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where

there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14For many are called, but few are chosen."

Author's Notes: R.S.V.P. is the abbreviation of the French phrase "Respondez, s'il vous plait." "Reply, if it pleases you." The meaning of the French phrase is clear enough. By saying this and meaning it, we subordinate our wishes to the will of someone who doubtless has their own agenda. "Pass the butter-unless of course you would prefer not to, since you have your fork in your hand."

The curt American "Please," on the other hand, sounds like a command: "Please me." And in practice many people use the word as though it were simply a requirement they had to meet in order to get what they want. As though since they have said what their mother required them to say first, now the other person has little choice but to oblige. The original intent of the phrase is thereby upended.

I think the phrase "Mind your p's and q's" is rhyming slang for "Mind your pleases and thankyou's." But minding them should mean meaning them. "Please" should be how we "prefer one another" (Rom 12:10 KJV); "Thank you" should be how we acknowledge that the other has acted freely towards us and not out of obligation. Hence the Spanish gracias, French Merci, and the Greek eucharisteo, a compound of the prefix good and root word "grace."

Doesn't it make you just want to read Luther's "Freedom of the Christian" again, with his juxtaposition of "perfectly free lord of all, subject to none" with "perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all"?

Back to our story, in which failures even "to R.S.V.P." anger the groom's dad.

DIAGNOSIS: “We Shall Not Come; We Shall Do As We Please.”

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Ignoring the Invite*

Jesus builds tension fast. Preposterously obstinate, self-willed people just won't come to be guests at a fabulous feast. Did you ever!!! I mean, rebellion you could understand, but this is ridiculous. His listeners chuckled, because they knew it happens. People!!

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Trivial Pursuits*

That kind of behavior goes to show that some people, and we're not talking about us, never, but some people are really, when you get right down to it, all about themselves. “I this, I that.” You would never catch us declining an invitation to a meal, especially a wedding, because you know what the host would think you thought about them. Just so the king. The comically exaggerated refusals-they killed the messenger!!-put on display for all to see, just how those who were invited felt about their king. Not a good thing, surely. They despised their king! This is far worse than being indifferent to the joy of a shirt-tail relative. To despise your king is to dethrone that king in your heart, which is where it matters most.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Killed*

“He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.” Well, why wouldn't he? If they were not his people (in their hearts, where lordship lies), they were the enemy. This sounds drastic to nice people like us who, in the same situation, would doubtless use diplomacy or maybe sanctions even, to bring them around. Thing is, if the king we are talking about is the only One whom to know is to live, there being no

other king-then the dying had already happened for these people. They died the day they transferred their fealty to a lesser god: themselves. From that point on, they were just dead men and women walking. When the king sent his troops to destroy them, all they had to do was bury the bodies.

PROGNOSIS: We Are Pleased to Accept Your Invitation. Put Us Down for the Ox Entree.

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Being the Feast*

But in our case, which is not fiction any more, the King doubled down and slew not oxen but his own Son to be the Feast to which he invites us all, even us who at first had not responded to the invitation. "Greater love has no one than this." We 2011-ites appear in this story as the invited who have already made our first refusal and are now being cajoled to accept the greatest possible gift anyone could ever make, offered us by the one from whom every good and perfect gift comes, the Father . . . In Jesus, a second invitation is being made to those who have already shown disloyal hearts. Second chance. That he still invites us, is God's grace.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Grateful*

We are convinced to come to the feast, re-enter the kingdom, by having our minds/hearts transformed. We are grateful. We recognize which side our bread is buttered on, and that the bread and butter are gift. The Spirit of God's mercy, more stubborn about inviting than we were about going our own way, makes us love God for the sake of Christ.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *The Wearin' of the White*

This here's a party! Fellow citizens with one another, fellow subjects of the Lord, we show where our faith lies by wearin' the colors. Celebrating. Refreshing the faith that made us

accept the second invitation. Rejoicing in the Kingdom that is one of love, joy, peace. Tomorrow we will be at work again, with renewed appreciation of what is really important and therefore an agenda that is shaped by a Lord who is the kind who would go the extra mile, turn the other cheek, even give himself for us! Let's go back to our towns on Monday with that kind of love in our hearts, but while we're here at the party, let's rejoice. Plus from now on, let's always be "pleased to respond" when our Lord calls.