

Gospel Lesson for Younger Children

Scripture: Matthew 22:1-14

In this season after Pentecost, we hear stories of Jesus' ministry in the world and our call to engage in that mission. This season is also known as Ordinary Time coming from the word "ordinal" which means counted time. This time is not ordinary as in common or regular, but it is the time of counted weeks between Pentecost and Advent. The color for this season is green and it is often referred to as the green growing time as we hear stories of what God is calling us to do in the world, we join in that call, and we grow in our faith.

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

This is the final parable that Jesus gives in the temple, and it is especially a difficult one for children and youth to understand. To explain the parable briefly, many sight it as being an allegory of salvation history. The wedding banquet is given by the king (God) for the son (Jesus). Many guests are invited ahead of time and say they will come, but on the day of the wedding, no one will come and some, in fact, abuse the slaves he sent to gather them. The king (God) is furious and sends troops to punish them.

The wedding banquet is still ready, so the king (God) tells the slaves to go and gather all who are in the streets, good and bad, to the banquet. They come, ready for the banquet – all except one, who is singled out and taken away. This final piece is said to be not about a physically being ready, but about leaving behind the old and being ready for the feast, being ready for God, presenting yourself to God in such a way as to say, I have prepared myself and am here. It is also good to note that in Jesus' culture, when one was invited to a wedding, there were robes given to the guests to wear and this man chose not to – he chose to keep his own clothes, thus not giving himself fully to God and to the feast.

This is a difficult parable that has been used to exclude people and bully people into being a certain way to get into the feast. This is really about God inviting us to come, choosing to come, and welcoming us to be ready when we are invited. Jesus is urging us to come to the feast when we are invited and to put on the “clothes” that God has provided for us. We are all invited into the kingdom of heaven, it is our choice to accept and prepare ourselves or not.

Theme: We are Invited

Supplies Needed: Party supplies, things to decorate the room, Heart shaped pieces of paper, markers, crayons, special food for the banquet, etc. See options below for a variety of activities.

Prepare:

Make sure the room (either the classroom or the room in which you hold coffee hour) is set up, ready to be decorated and prepared for the feast.

Note: If you are hosting coffee hour, make sure you sign up ahead of time and/or clear it with the staff of the church so no one is surprised. Put the coffee on to brew before the children arrive so that is not forgotten.

Beginning: Welcome the children into the room and have them sit in your gathering area. Ask how their week was and what they had for dinner the night before or breakfast that morning. If you want to lead into the lesson, you can ask them if they have ever been to a big party or banquet. What was that like? Did you wear special clothes?

Opening Prayer: *Loving God, we thank you for bringing us together today to hear and understand your will for our lives. Be with us as we prepare for you to come into our lives. Amen.*

The Story: Matthew 22:1-14

In the Bible we hear stories of many people. These people are just like us, they eat and sleep, go to school and work. God has a plan for each of them, and in hearing the stories we learn that God's plan is for each of us too.

Read Matthew 22:1-14

Reflection Questions:

- I wonder why no one came to the feast?
- I wonder why the king got so angry?
- I wonder what the strangers on the street thought when they were invited to a wedding feast?
- I wonder what this might tell us about God's invitations to us?

Introduction to the Activity:

The parable that we heard today can be a really hard one for us to understand. There is so much going on and most of what we hear is unfamiliar. This is a parable that is a cautionary tale for the religious authorities of Jesus time, reminding them that God is inviting us to the kingdom of heaven and they need to be ready when God comes. They need to not be too busy to take the call. They need to put on the robes that God gives them and celebrate their new life in God. We, as people of God, are to prepare ourselves for the kingdom of God, to get ready for the feast, because we are all welcome.

Prepare and Partake in a Feast

Note: The older children may be preparing a feast for coffee hour or after church. You may want to check with that class to see if you could work together or if the Younger Children could bring something to the feast.

Because God has invited us all to the banquet or the kingdom of heaven, we are going to spend today, having our own feast and celebrating God in our lives.

The Party: As the teacher, you may want to prepare invitations for each child to hand out to them, saying that they are invited to the kingdom of heaven or invited to the banquet.

Once the children “come” to the banquet, they can do any of the following activities to prepare themselves and the room for the feast.

- Invite the children to draw pictures about they will prepare for God’s party
- Invite the children decorate the room while others decorate cookies or snacks to share with everyone
- If you have costumes, allow them to “get dressed” for the feast.
- Have the children draw pictures or write on a heart shaped piece of paper what they are giving to God at the feast to symbolize them giving their hearts to God.
- Invite some of the children to set up your feast area with plates, decorations, etc. for the occasion.

Once the preparations have been done, sit with the children and enjoy the feast. You may want to have a special snack for the occasion today, marking that it is a feast and more than just your regular time together. Some suggestions: special muffins or coffee cake, donuts, fruit salad, banana bread with frosting (like wedding cakes have frosting), etc. You can even bring the bread or cookies undecorated and have them decorate the snacks themselves.

Throw a feast! During the feast, you can ask the children if they have ever been to a special meal. What was it like? What food was served? Who was there? What do you think God’s banquet is like? Etc. This is a time to enjoy the feast God has invited you all to join.

Closing Prayer: *Gracious God, We thank you for our time together today. Thank you for the feast that reminds us that we are all invited and all welcome at the table. Help us to remember to always be preparing our hearts and souls for you to come into our lives in new and amazing ways. Amen.*

Matthew 22:1-14

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

"But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless. Then 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.' For many are called, but few are chosen."

Written by The Rev. Shannon Kelly