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St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church
19th Sunday after Pentecost/Year A/Proper23
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Text: Matthew 22:1-14

“Fully Committed”

This is the first season that I have been able to attend most of my youngest nephew's soccer games. I am amazed at the remarkable difference of the now fleet of foot sixth graders who have matured in their athleticism as they sprint from one side of the field to the other and deflect soccer balls off the tops of their heads like the pros. This is much different from the then second graders who erratically followed the ball hoping that they wouldn't get kicked in the shins. It hasn't exactly been a winning season for the boy's team of St. Ferdinand. They are nearing the end of the season and have yet to win a game. But they keep trying with the encouragement of parents, siblings, and coaches. At just about every game, a parent or coach can be heard yelling, “Go for it! Commit to it! Commit to it! Come on, let's go!”

Commitment is one of those things that can be easily halted or cautiously approached whether there is a soccer game and seven or eight pairs of legs coming straight at you or when making a life decision. Most of us have probably experienced that feeling of not being able to follow through at one time or other when it seemed that the odds were stacked against us or if we were undergoing a difficult task and the result we were after seemed far away. But if we are lucky there was and is always something or someone urging us to persevere, to go all the way and ‘go for it!’

Today we heard the last in a series of three parables Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees in the Temple.

A wedding guest shows up without proper attire and winds up being thrown out of the party and into the darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth? Needless to say, it is a difficult parable because who (besides a bridezilla) would be *that* upset about “appropriate” attire? Clearly there is more to the Parable of the Wedding Feast.

As usual, Jesus' parable is filled with twists and turns as a king decided to host a huge wedding banquet for his son. When everything was ready he sent his servants out to call those who had been invited but they refused or ignored him.

Yet again he sent his servants out only to have his invitation rejected, sometimes violently.

The king responded by killing the murderers and destroying their city. He then sent out more servants with the instruction to invite anyone and everyone they could find. Soon the wedding hall was filled. However, as the king greeted his guests he noticed one individual who had not come dressed for the occasion. There was no excuse for it as in those days most people owned at least two garments—one for every day and one festive garment. Sometimes a wedding garment was provided. Yet, this man had not prepared for the banquet because he was still in his street clothes! When the man is asked why he had not put on the proper garments, he said nothing. So the king had him thrown out into “the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” In his parable, Jesus never tells us why the man did not simply change his clothes or speak up for himself but the issue had little to do with the dress code and more to do with his commitment to the feast that was offered him. It is clear that the man’s action or inaction had serious consequences. Our actions or inactions have consequences too and at times we are no better than those who rejected the king’s invitation or the man who showed up in the wrong clothes.

Today’s parable reminds us of God’s gracious invitation to which *everyone* is invited. It is up to us to use our own free will to accept God’s invitation to kingdom living and the hope of the heavenly banquet or reject it. But there is more to our just showing up at the door like the man who had not come dressed for the occasion. Jesus’ vision of community, of us calling ourselves followers of Christ, runs much deeper than that.

Within most churches there are those who are quick to show up for Coffee Hour or a meal but never take the time to serve a meal or donate to the food pantry. There are those who want God’s blessings but somehow always manage to disappear when the real work of ministry begins. There are others who are content to warm up the pews and do nothing else. But it is not enough to just show up. As one theologian put it: “It is not enough to say you are a “Christian” and then stay silent when life, liberty, and love are in jeopardy.”* We are called to do more.

Over the last couple of weeks and especially in today’s gospel, the parables that Jesus told are clear—that God is looking for those willing and able to produce “good fruit” for the sake of the kingdom. God is looking for those committed to living out their baptismal promises by proclaiming God’s Word, seeing and

serving Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor, *truly* loving our neighbor, and striving for justice and peace.

God is not looking for warm bodies to show up at the door. We must ask ourselves before it is too late, whether we have fully clothed ourselves with the mind of Christ. Have we, as Paul says in Romans (12:2b), allowed ourselves to “be transformed by the renewing of (y)our minds, so that you (we) may discern what is the will of God-what is good and acceptable and perfect?” Are we willing to accept and commit to God’s invitation?

Speaking of commitment, this week we launch into our ‘official’ annual stewardship campaign. And you are invited to come with us as we express our gratitude to God by responding through gifts of time, talent, and treasure.

Throughout the year we are reminded that ‘stewardship is a way of life.’ The journey of our faith lives offers many opportunities to step back and acknowledge the gifts we each have been given by our God. And then collectively we respond as a community giving back to God the gifts that we have received. The ministries that we do here can only be done together as the Body of Christ. Together we can do so much more than we can do individually, as each one brings our unique gifts and shares them.

Yes, during this season of campaign, we talk about money. We/I don’t like to talk about money but there is no getting around it. Remember the scene in ‘Meet Me in St. Louis’ when the oldest daughter, Rose, complained to her father after he announced that he was going to be sent to New York? Rose says, “I hate, loathe, despise, and abominate money!” The father looked at her and responded, “You also spend it!” Indeed, we do! My pledge, your pledges are vital to making ministry happen here. As do your time and talents, and your presence. Our tithing is among many things that is important, not only for the life of this parish but for the good of our community. And it takes all of us coming together, giving as generously as we are able to give.

Your pledge packets will be coming to you shortly in the mail this week. Please be in prayer about your gift-giving for the coming year so that we can continue to be a strong presence here in the heart of Florissant. We cannot be about God’s business without you. Amen!

*“What Not to Wear,” commentary on Matthew 22:1-14 by Karoline Lewis, Dear Working Preacher