

“Transforming Grace”

Matthew 22:1-14

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Prayer for Understanding Gracious God please help us understand and live your will. Open our hearts to love as you love. Amen

World Communion Sunday is a celebration that everyone will enjoy their place at the eternal glorious banquet of God. Homiletics states: “Grace invites everyone and changes everything. The feast is free, but it will not leave you the same. We often treat grace as optional. God’s invitation disrupts both rejection and indifference, calling us beyond mere attendance into transformation. Grace is not just about getting in the door; grace is about becoming someone new once inside.”

Pastor Rachel Held Evans wrote: “The gospel is scandalously inclusive. The gospel does not need a coalition devoted to keeping the wrong people out. The gospel needs a family of sinners, saved by grace, committed to tearing down the walls, throwing open the doors and shouting, ‘Welcome! There is bread and wine. Come eat with us and talk.’ This is not a realm for the worthy; it is a realm for the hungry.”

Frederick Buechner wrote: “The parables are essentially about the outlandishness of God who does impossible things with impossible people. It is only when you hear the gospel as a wild and marvelous that you really hear the good news.”

The good news of Matthew proclaims: **Matthew 22:1-14 NLT Jesus also told them other parables. Jesus said, “The Realm of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a king who prepared a great wedding feast for his son. When the banquet was ready, he sent his servants to notify those who were invited. But they all refused to come! “So he sent other servants to tell them, ‘The feast has been prepared. The bulls and fattened cattle have been killed, and everything is ready. Come to the banquet!’ But the guests he had invited ignored them and went their own way, one to his farm, another to his business. Others seized his messengers and insulted them and killed them. “The king was furious, and he sent out his army to destroy the murderers and burn their town. And he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, and the guests I invited are not worthy of the honor.” Now go out to the street corners and invite everyone you see.’ So the servants brought in everyone they could find, good and bad alike, and the banquet hall was filled with guests. “But when the king came in to meet the guests, he noticed a man who was not wearing the proper clothes for a wedding. ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how is it that you are here without wedding clothes?’ But the man had no reply. Then the king said to his aides, ‘Bind his hands and feet and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ “For many are called, but few are chosen.”**

Pastor Carla Pratt Keyes preached that the good news of this parable is the realm of God will be safe for everyone because no one will be permitted to hurt anyone else.

God graciously continually overflows the cosmos with goodness. God provides an endless feast and a table that has a specific place for each person where they belong, flourish and enhance the glory of the banquet.

In Jesus’ parable, God provides the king with all the ingredients to host a celebratory feast for everyone. The king represents religion and governance who are to make sure that all people are invited, welcomed, and enjoy the banquet. Tragically, the king, religion, and government are blind to the gracious abundance for everyone and instead worry about scarcity, so they only invite those they judge worthy. They refuse to come to the banquet because they mistakenly believe they do not need grace. They are delusional, thinking, I will earn my way, I am better than others, my goodness will yield a good life, I am self-sufficient, I do not need God, I will enjoy my small walled off life. Again, they are invited to enjoy grace. This time they reject the invitation because they are too busy. Others insult the messenger. They mock the concept that grace is a free gift to be enjoyed by all. Others kill the messenger. They reject grace. They are determined to hoard resources and protect their resources at any cost, even if it means killing those who are advocating for others.

Tragically, the king, religion, and governance respond to rejection with rejection, hate with hate, violence with violence. We burn our cities down with the pyramid of indifference. All of us are indifferent at times, we fail to love God, love self, and love all people fully every moment of our lives. We get wrapped up in our own concerns. We lack compassion for everyone. The next level of the pyramid is some people start thinking they are better than other people and can earn their place at the banquet. Left to fester, they begin to disparage people for not doing things their way. Moving up the pyramid, judgement becomes discrimination. Discrimination becomes a demand for exclusion, then fear, then hate, then oppression, then violence, then building walls, then writing laws to cast others out, then constructing economic barriers to keep certain people away. This is how we burn our cities down.

Richard Rohr wrote: “Christianity began imperial thinking in 313. When you are aligned with Empire, you are forced to prefer a spirituality of achievement, performance, worthiness and willpower. Conformity to cultural virtue becomes much more important than love of outsiders. It is as if Christianity has been saying, “We have the perfect medicine for what ails you: grace. But the only requirement for receiving grace is never to need grace!” The only way to give everyone equal and universal access to God is to base salvation/enlightenment on woundedness instead of self-created trophies. If we are honest, this utterly levels the playing field. Until you bottom out and come to the limits of your own fuel supply, there is no reason for you to switch to a higher octane of fuel. Why would you? You will not learn to actively draw upon a Larger Source, God, until your usual resources are depleted and revealed as inadequate to the task. Now you are ready to begin a sincere spiritual journey.”

So far, the parable portrays the mess humanity has created. Suddenly, grace transforms the king, religion, and governance, and they now invite everyone to the banquet. And everyone accepts the invitation.

Tragically, some who come to the banquet refuse to be transformed by grace, the parable describes failure to love as not wearing the proper clothes. They reject grace for all. They refuse to love everyone. Not being changed by grace is darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Grace is completely free and disruptive. The invitation costs nothing and the transformation changes everything. Often, we try to avoid this tension. We want a God who invites us to the party and then leaves us alone once we get there. We want grace that gets us in the door, but does not ask us to change once we are inside. Forgiveness without reorientation. Belonging without transformation. Jesus tells a parable that refuses to let us settle for that. The person without the garment is not someone who could not afford the proper clothes. The host has provided the clothes, (love) and everything that is needed. The issue is not access, rather refusal. They show up, but do not receive what has been given. They want the party without complete participation. Many of us are good at showing up. We show up at church. We worship. We come to the table. Jesus is asking: Have we truly received what we have been given, or have we simply learned how to attend without being changed? We are all surrounded by grace. Tragically, some refuse to allow grace to transform them to freely love everyone. The warning is that you might accept grace for yourself and refuse to be gracious to everyone.

Homiletics states: “We want a grace that fits into our lives without rearranging our life. A grace that comforts without confronting. A grace that gets us into the party but does not ask us to change clothes. We are to live into grace. Grace is not an idea. Grace is a reality that reshapes how you see the world, how you think and how you act. It is not just that you have been invited to the party. It is that you are being made into someone who belongs there. That takes time, surrender and letting go of the version of yourself that was perfectly comfortable staying out in the field, working in the office or standing in the corner of the banquet refusing to put on what has been given. It is why this parable still stings — because it refuses to let us hide. It refuses to let us reduce grace to attendance or say, “At least I showed up.” The invitation is real. The feast is ready. The doors are open wider than we ever imagined. But the grace that brings you in is the same grace that changes you once you are there. Jesus tells a parable about a king who throws a feast for people who do not deserve it, did not earn it, and were not even on the original guest list. Then, he expects them to receive grace fully, be changed by grace and look like they belong to grace. It is about the realm of God who refuses to leave us as we are. The person without the proper clothes is not in the darkness, weeping and gnashing their teeth for being imperfect. They are confronted for refusing grace that will transform them, enabling them to be gracious to everyone. So, the question is not whether you have been invited. You have. The question is not whether there is a place for you at the table. There is. The question is whether you are willing to receive the grace that not only welcomes you in but refuses to let you stay the same. Because grace that does not change you is not grace. Jesus came to invite us to a feast where nobody should be invited and by grace everybody is invited, everyone belongs and by grace everyone is transformed to be gracious to everyone.

Everyone is expected to wear the garment of Christ, the garment of grace for all. John Pavlovitz wrote: “I am tired of professed Christians preaching a Jesus that they have no interest at all in emulating. A religious people being a loud loveless noise while claiming to speak for God who is love. Do not be horrible to people. Do not treat others as less worthy of love, respect, dignity, joy and opportunity than you are. Do not create characters out of them based on their skin color, religion, sexual orientation, the amount of money they have or the circumstances they find themselves in. Do not seek to take away things from them that you already enjoy in abundance, civil rights, clean water, education, marriage, access to health care. Do not tell someone’s story for them about why they are poor, depressed, addicted, victimized, alone.”

The day is coming when we will much more than not, be horrible to each other. We will be gracious to each other. Indifference--lack of love for everyone leads to judging, fear, oppression, hate and violence, being horrible. The antidote is Holy Communion. We are about to join with people around the world to feast upon God’s redeeming grace freely offered to all people. Amen

