

SERMON “Choosing Being Chosen” by Rev. Dr. Kristina Stone Kaiser

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As we begin to think today about *choosing and being chosen*, perhaps we can offer ourselves a moment to ask ourselves this question:

What intention would I like to set for the next few weeks?

Feel free to jot a few notes down in the margins of your bulletin if you'd like. *What intention would I like to set for the next few weeks?*

Whatever it is that you're feeling prompted towards, it may even be helpful to **say it out loud** to someone yet today as way of allowing that intention to become more solid and real to you. It may even be helpful to **write those intentions** somewhere where you **will see them every day** because it's easy for the **busy-ness of life to take over, isn't it?** Isn't that part of why we say almost every Sunday during our Unison Prayer of Confession some version of: **...may we again set our intentions to live as faithful disciples**

For me, my intention is to make a return to these *Abundant Joy* practices that were such a huge part of my life a few years ago when I asked the question for my doctoral project: *Can our quality of life increase by spending just 10 minutes a day on a spiritual practice?* And having gone through that process, I know very definitively that even just those 10 minutes of focus every day helps me remain present to other intentions I really care about – like connection. So that's me. You're welcome to keep working on your intentions as we go.

But with these collective intentions in mind, let's take a **closer look** at our 2nd Scripture Reading for today. In that passage, Jesus tells a **parable** about a **wedding banquet**. And so, naturally, our minds go to **weddings**. But! To expand that a bit...In the **context of Judaism**, it was understood that banquets were also part of observing the **passing from this life to the next**. We also have the context of **Jesus as the bridegroom** to keep in mind here as well. And the **historical context** here is of note as well because, who is **Jesus** but **Emmanuel** – the **with-us God**. The time has finally come! There is somewhere between **400 and 500 years** between the **narratives of the Old Testament** and the **coming of Jesus**. They have been waiting a **long time** for the **prophesied Messiah**. And so here is Jesus, using a **parable** to say to the people: ***The time has come! The feast is ready!***

It's time to **celebrate**. But instead, we find that **those who had been waiting** for the banquet...**refused to go**. Things have **not gone as they imagined** they would and so **they reject** the banquet. For some, this rejection shows up as something that looks a little bit like **ambivalence**. But others actually **KILL** the messengers! And though maybe this would have caused any one of us to cancel the party, not so here. Instead, the **invitation goes out** to the **entire world**. Anyone and everyone is invited, until the **hall is full**. Brimming with people. And if the parable would have ended there, we'd have a pretty good parable, wouldn't we? We would have heard: *There were some people who had originally thought they would go to a banquet, but then they blew it off, so the king widened the invitation, and a great banquet was held to represent the passing from one way of living to another.*

But this is **not the end** of the parable. Instead, we hear that the king asks someone, *“How did you get in here without wedding clothes?”*

Now...all of these years later, we need a little bit of **interpretation** here to understand **the context**. The real question being asked is not specifically: *Why are you wearing the wrong clothes?* The **more accurate question** being asked here is: *“Why are you not prepared?”* Because, again, the **banquet** is thought to be this **symbol** of the **union** between God and people, God and the body of Christ. And so, when we hear about these “wedding clothes,” the clothes are acting as a **representation of *not fully accepting grace as a means of salvation***. And if we remember back to the beginning of the parable, the wedding feast had been **set**. The people **had RSVP’d**. They **wanted to go!** And **then they didn’t** want to go. Why not?

The answer was similar to what we heard from the book of **Jonah** a few weeks ago. Jonah tells God in **chapter 4, verse 2**: *I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.*

This is also what we heard in our **1st Scripture reading** for today in **Psalm 106, verse 1**: *O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.* How often is it the case that we are **not ready** and **not willing to accept** an **intention of grace and love**? This actually becomes the basis of much of the **New Testament**. Paul repeatedly reminds people: *You accepted grace as your means of salvation. Why are you now so quickly turning back to rules-based living. You insist on circumcision. You fear eating with people who are not like you. Why have you done this? Those of us who tried to live by the law ought to know how impossible it is.* The guest who is not wearing wedding clothes is meant to **prompt us to engage** with this matter of **salvation by grace** – that **it cannot be about what we have, or haven’t, done**. It is meant to prompt us to **work out our salvation**, more specifically, to **choose salvation**. The final words of the parable are: *Many are invited. Few are chosen.* You see...many are invited to the banquet. Few accept the invitation. Few choose. This is **not about wearing the wrong clothes to the party**.

The **parable is**: There was a wedding banquet. The **people who had known** that the banquet was coming for quite some time **refused to go**. Not only did they refuse to go, some of them **became violent**. But the banquet hall **would be filled**, and so the king **invited everyone** to the banquet – the **good and the bad** – until the hall was filled. But some had come **without preparing themselves**. Some **did not accept** the invitation. Some **did not choose** the invitation by preparing themselves. They were **all were invited**...but *not all set their intentions towards relationship, connection, and love*. And in fact, the **Greek** word for “many” in **verse 14** is better interpreted as “all” in our language. *All are invited. Few are chosen.* Or more accurately put, **few choose to accept**. But the **invitation is for everyone**. We are offered an important question to ponder here: *Will you choose to accept the invitation?* Will you **prepare yourself** for what is to come after this life?

Or – do we find ourselves **identifying more** with the one who **refuses to come**? With the one who is **more concerned with business**? Do we maybe even identify with the one who is **mistreating the messenger**? Do we identify with **being unprepared**? Can we sit with the parable and ask ourselves: *What is this? What’s here?* I know I **easily identify with being too busy** – too busy **to connect** because the worries of this life choke out all the joy of connection. **But the invitation is for each of us, all the same**. If you wonder if you are invited and if you have been called, you are, and you have been. Only one question remains: *What do you choose?* Even as it’s so easy to be lost in the busy-ness, even as there is so much suffering, we are **offered hope**. Our faith is the assurance of things hoped for. In the Psalm from today, it was **Moses** who **stood in the breach** on behalf of the Israelites. In the **Gospels**, it is **Jesus** who **stands in the breach for us all** so that we can do what Moses tells the people in **Deuteronomy 30: Choose life**. Here in Matthew: **You are invited. Choose to come. Choose to engage with what it means to come.**

And so we return to the question we began with today: ***What intention would you like to set for these next few weeks? How do you feel called to choose?***

And if there is something coming to mind, maybe **start today**. It takes 21 days to form a habit and 90 days to make it a lifestyle. But if you find that you missed connecting with your intention on any day at all, rather than quitting altogether, maybe just **start again**. That's what **grace** is all about. It's about knowing that we have to **start again**. And in the midst of it all, maybe **ask the people around you to support you in your intention**. Let them inspire you to start and start again. Let us be people of grace and love together.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever. Pray.