SERMON:

In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus tells about invited guests who fail to show for the wedding of the king's son.

People don't usually fail to come to a palace wedding.

When a king's son or daughter gets married, everyone wants to come.

It is almost unthinkable that anyone would fail to show.

But stranger things have happened. In one of the first weddings I attended, the bride did **not** show.

The groom and the vicar were waiting nervously at the church, and there was no bride.

* Fifteen minutes before the appointed hour, no bride.
* Ten minutes, no bride.
* Five minutes, no bride.

The vicar finally suggested that the groom call her.

He protested, because she lived some distance away –

surely, she was on the road.

But he dialled her number, and we heard him say,

**"Hello. What are you doing at home?"**

 She answered that she was hemming her dress. I could see the astonishment on his face. **"Hemming your dress!**

**How long is that going to take?"** Her answer was that,

it was going to take **however long it took.**

We might think that the bride had changed her mind, but she hadn't. She just hadn't got her dress hemmed, and she wouldn't be there until she’d finished.

The vicar went into the sanctuary and told the guests that the wedding would be delayed. Then he went to see the groom and asked, **"Are you sure you want to do this?"**

He laughed and said, he was sure. The bride finally came, and we had the wedding.

**I always wondered how that marriage worked out.**

So strange things do happen at weddings - and Jesus told us about a strange thing.

 A king invited people to his son's wedding, and nobody showed up. They all gave excuses.

They even mistreated the servants that the king sent to them.

 So the king punished them - and then he sent his servants to invite whomever they could. **"Go into the streets."** he said, **"Find me some guests."** So the servants went to the streets and invited everyone they saw - good and bad.

They filled the banquet hall with guests, which is what the king needed. He couldn't have a party in an empty hall!

But then the king noticed a guest who was not wearing a wedding robe. Everyone else had robes, but this man did not. The king told his servants to throw the man out - to cast him into outer darkness.

Then Jesus concluded this parable by saying,

"For many are called, but few are chosen" (v. 14).

I wouldn't blame you if you said, "That story doesn't make sense! Frankly, the first time I read it, I thought the same thing. But then I studied it and learned that perhaps it does make sense - that it has something important to say to us today. So let’s see if it does.

In this story,

* the king is God.
* The invited guests are the people of Israel.
* The mistreated servants are the prophets - God's messengers. Israel was infamous for mistreating the prophets.
* The people from the streets were Gentiles.

Perhaps, this is a story of Israel rejecting the prophets - rejecting Jesus - and losing their place at the front of the line. Perhaps it’s the story of God wanting **faithful** people - and opening the door to all sorts of people to fill the banquet hall.

But it is also the story of people offering to follow Jesus and then failing to do so.

IT MIGHT BE OUR STORY.

We are always tempted to accept the invitation to follow Jesus - and then to balk when it comes time to pay the price.

Sometimes following Christ is difficult.

The Bishop of Atlanta, Will Willimon, told of a man under his charge who told him not to worry about the low salary he was receiving.

He said that he had been in a job with a six digit salary when Jesus called him to quit that job and go to bible college. Sometimes following Christ involves real sacrifice!

Doubtless, Christ hasn’t called us to quit our hundred thousand dollar job to go to theological college, but he has called us to faithful discipleship. What does that mean?

Perhaps it means that Christ has called us to be faithful with our TIME––to devote time to prayer - to public worship - to service in the church.

Perhaps it means that Christ has called us to be faithful with our MONEY - to tithe - to support your church financially - to help needy people.

Perhaps it means that Christ has called us to be HONEST in our dealings with other people - to be honest in financial dealings - to be honest in relationships.

Perhaps it means that Christ has called us to LIVE A LIFE THAT WILL DRAW PEOPLE TO CHRIST - including our family.

Perhaps it means RAISING OUR CHILDREN in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Perhaps It means bringing them to church - to Sunday school - to youth group. - reading bible stories to them - praying with them - loving them - guiding them.

Perhaps it means knowing where they are - who their friends are - getting involved - meddling in their affairs.

Those are some of the things that Christ calls all of us to do - but he probably has other designs on your life as well. He might want you to teach a Sunday school class or to sponsor a youth group. He might want you to serve on a church committee or parish council.

He might want you to quit your hundred thousand pound job and go to a theological college. He might want you to feed the hungry. So let’s LISTEN! Listen for the invitation! When it comes, don't fail to obey.

 Then Jesus told about the man who came to the wedding in the wrong clothing. He was supposed to wear a wedding robe, but he came in his grubbies. The king had the man cast **"into the outer darkness; there is where the weeping and grinding of teeth will be"** (v. 13). What was that all about?

Perhaps the wedding robe in this story stands for clean living - righteous lives.

The man who came to the party without a robe is like the Christian who says that he will follow Jesus, but who continues to live in sin.

He is like a person who goes camping for a week and then shows up unshaven and unwashed at a formal party.

That is almost worse than not showing up at all.

Perhaps Jesus warns that he won't tolerate the person who claims to be a Christian but continues to live as always.

He expects us to show up, but then he also expects us to grow in grace - to become new people whose lives reflect that we belong to him.

That doesn't mean that Christ requires us to be perfect. Far from it! Christ is happy to forgive our sins - and we all need forgiveness! But there are limits!

This parable teaches us that when we give our lives to Christ, he expects that to make a difference. He expects us to begin to change.

He expects us to let the Spirit begin reshaping our lives.

Let me end this sermon by asking us all to do **two things**:

• **First**, let us LISTEN - to listen for Christ's invitation - to listen so that we hear where he wants us to be -

and what he wants us to do.

When we hear his call, answer it and **come to the party!**

• **Secondly,** let’s examine our life. Have I given my life to Christ? Has that made a difference? Do I spend time in worship? In prayer? Am I willing to let God reshape me into someone beautiful. - someone holy?

Christ has big plans for each one of us - personally.

 • He plans to use us to make our FAMILY into something

 beautiful.

 • He plans to use us to make our WORKPLACE

 a beautiful place.

 • He plans to use us to make this CHURCH beautiful.

 • To make our COMMUNITY beautiful.

 • To make our WORLD beautiful.

 • But first, we must let him make EACH ONE OF US

 beautiful.

 **Amen.**