October 11 message

I'm guessing that all of us have received a save the date postcard in the mail for some occasion. Our schedules can get pretty filled; there are many choices we can make when it comes to how we will spend our time, so folks usually send out these postcards well in advance. Then the invitations come with the hope that the date has really been saved and with a RSVP.

Maybe in school some time ago you may have learned what RSVP stands for. We all know that a response is requested but we many have forgotten that RSVP stands is an abbreviation for the French phrase, répondez s'il vous plaît, asking invitees to confirm whether they will attend an event. And no, I do not know French, yet I find it interesting how that continues to be used. This is not to be confused when someone maybe angry or upset and says something inappropriate and says "excuse my French." Makes one wonder how that phrase got started. I guess that is one of the great mysteries of our day.

In the first parable people are, in a way, given a save the date announcement. First they are invited, and then later they are told everything is ready. Life was difficult to say the least for the common Jew at the time of Jesus. A wedding feast would have been one of the few chances for the guests to actually enjoy themselves. People in Jesus' day very rarely ate meat, because it was so expensive. To be invited to such an event and to be able to eat meat was a real delicacy.

Yet people still decline. Even worse is how some mistreated and even killed the king's servants. As we consider the different responses for not attending we might see it two different ways.

The first is found in the beginning of verse 5, "but they paid no attention and went off…." Even though life is hard, they are used to their lives this way and don't want to chance doing something different.

Some people are that way, of course. Even though their lives may be very mundane they would rather keep it that way then venture out. This summer I visited an old friend near where I grew up who lost his wife 3 years ago. His life involves staying home watching TV. He has told me how he has become a hermit and doesn't get out at all. I've tried to encourage him to maybe move closer to his son and family but he is quite content with the life he's chosen. He used to enjoy going to car shows and one was close the day I visited. I offered to go there with him for an hour or so, but he declined saying he needed to mow the yard.

Well, I may be stretching it a bit here but people can be that way when it comes to their faith. I hear this once in a while when someone will tell me how "church isn't for them." All the encouragement doesn't seem to make a difference. People can be very stuck in their ways as we all know. Every so often someone will mention how so and so can be a stubborn old German. I look around and think of our last names and realize how we all can have our moments like that, I know I do.

Sometimes stubbornness can take over. Even though one may wonder if there is more to life the temptation is to decline the king's invitation to the banquet feast. Remember this was a celebration for his son; He was so proud of his son and wants to share the joy. The king, of course, is God and many decline his invitation. People can be content with the way their lives are without accepting the invitation to the banquet honoring Christ.

Note the king did not give up, he offers this invitation to all. Neither should we give up in efforts to share the good news with others. Fortunately today there are many different avenues for growth. Many of those who say "church isn't for them" have access to different religious broadcasts and may follow one. This can make a difference in one's life and have positive effects. The Lord works through many different ways and like the king in the parable He doesn't quit sending the invitation. This is good to recognize and take to heart and not give up reaching out to others.

The second reason for declining the king's invitation is a matter of priorities in life. Again verse 5 gives us a clue, "But they paid no attention and went off- one to his field, another to his business."

Our lives reflect the choices we make. I'm old enough to remember when stores were not open on Sundays. Then in the early 70's the malls started opening on Sunday afternoons. That was a big deal. Now people could and did go to the mall and shop or do whatever. Some see that as a turning point for worship attendance. The local church was now competing with other options available. Now just about everything is open on Sunday except the mom and pop shops and a few other places like Hobby Lobby that choose to take the day off. Today there are more activities ways to spend our time than ever before. Many weekend events start on Friday evening and include Sunday mornings. About the only restriction I see is no Sunday morning liquor sales in the town I lived by until 11.

While Jesus tells this parable in Jerusalem during his final week when He knew the Jewish leaders were arranging His death, the parable also applies to us today. Even without knowledge of the customs surrounding first-century banquet invitations, we should realize there is a snub going on. These invitations were not out of the blue. The practice in that day was to send invitations well ahead of time, and then to those who agreed to come, a courtesy reminder invitation went out at the time of the banquet. To refuse the invitation at that point was rude and insulting, nothing more than a snub.

The people in the parable have excuses. But all their reasons really come down to not having the time or should we say not willing to make the time and commitment. All of us know how we can make time for the things that are really important to us. Our lives reflect that. Most people make taking care of their health a priority. I visit with a lot of older folks who tell me that much of their time is taken up with doctor visits. These are necessary for their well-being. Then other activities can follow. We make time for the things that we feel are really important.

The question then for us today is will we make the time to fully accept the invitation to the king's banquet in every aspect of our lives? Or will we make excuses to not fully accept this invitation? By fully accepting, I know by experience how one can be content with many things in one's life the way they are. Prayers are a good example. Most of us want to keep our prayers between God and ourselves. Challenging us to pray more with others including our spouses pushes us past our present boundaries we have created. Fully accepting God's invitation causes us to leave our comfort zones for what can be a better and stronger faith.

There are other areas in our lives will be affected also. I think the temptation is and always has been there to build our own little kingdoms here on earth. It may not be much but because it's ours we can place too much importance on what we have here on our earthly journeys. We can forget how we are but stewards of what the Lord has blessed us with and get caught up in what we might accumulate and accomplish here in our lifetimes. This is a distraction to fully accepting the invitation the Lord sends.

The second parable in our reading is almost seems like an after-thought. But there is an important lesson to be learned here. At a glance one may say, "Well, here's a poor guy off the street who was invited and accepted, of course he didn't have the proper clothes." A quick study of the customs of the time includes how the host would have provided the proper garment. This man chose not to be dressed appropriately for the occasion. He could have changed like everyone else; but he didn't want to. This is insulting to the host.

The clothing available to this man and all in attendance is the garment of righteousness available in Christ. The lesson is how we need to embrace the surrendering of our sin and accept the righteousness offered through God's son. It's not something we have earned, it's grace, gift that is ours if we accept the righteousness God offers.

This is a righteousness that makes us examine ourselves and change our ways. Maybe we need to change out of some old prejudices, old grudges we carry, and habits we have that keeps the Lord out of every aspect of our lives.

We too are invited to the banquet to celebrate God's son. But it isn't a 'come as you are party.' It's RSVP to God's invitation and a readiness to be changed when you get there.

That's what Paul is getting at in our Galatians reading. God generously invites us all to his gracious banquet. We are invited to be changed and clothed in Christ.

The challenge then is for us to truly examine ourselves and realize how we need to fully accept the invitation God sent and be clothed and be changed by this righteousness. Amen