**Introduction**

What does it mean to be worthy?

Ultimately that is what our gospel text today is about. But before we turn to the text itself, I think that is a word whose definition is in flux. It’s in flux because it is not a word that we use much anymore. It smacks of judgement. Another word that used to have a positive force. So-and-so has good judgement. To be judicious was akin to be wise. And these were unapologetically good things. You hoped that a person with judgement would find you worthy. But today judgement is usually pejorative. Followed quickly by someone who doesn’t believe in Jesus quoting to you “don’t judge.” Which of course that saying of Jesus was about a person’s final fate which is wholly in the judgement of God, not ours. Don’t judge meant don’t elevate to heaven or even more damn to hell, because that judgement isn’t ours. But a level of judgement in this world? That is completely ours. Of course that same judgement should be turned upon ourselves. One of the reasons I love the older confessional formula, “I am a poor miserable sinner.” But having good judgement is necessary to consider the worthy.

To be worthy is to have our actions or character merit recognition. The honorable soldier maintains his post. The one worthy of the medal of honor does something that is beyond that call. Usually so far beyond the call that reading the write-ups, if it didn’t happen, you wouldn’t believe it. If you want to understand worthy, I’d suggest reading a few of those citations. Worthy can also apply not to people but ideas or actions. There are ideas or actions that are worthy of time and effort. And there are things that we spend an inordinate amount of time on that are completely unworthy. Do discern the difference requires good judgement.

**Text**

The parable that is our gospel text today follows immediately on last week’s the parable of the wicked tenants. In some ways it explains that one further, and in others it expand on it. The tenants parable formally ends with simply the judgement that the owner of the vineyard will come and destroy the evil tenants and give the vineyard to others. But it doesn’t say anything about those new tenants.

The first part of the parable of the wedding feast mirrors that. The time has come. Not the time for fruit to be gathered, but the time for the wedding. The Son of the King is getting married and the King is throwing the wedding feast to end all wedding feasts. And this is not the type of thing that get sprung on you. If you are invited to the Royal wedding, you know it long in advance. And the day comes, and the king sends his heralds to say “come now”. And just like all of Jesus’ parables, at some point things go sideways. Things become hyperbolically weird. These invitees would not come. Can you imagine telling the King, “sorry, can’t make it.” Worse than telling him, they just ghost him. The day itself comes close and the halls are empty. So the King sends some other servants out with some incentives. “come, the oxen and the fat calves have been slaughtered.” Come, the table is full of Wild Salmon and Kobe Beef and Jumbo Shrimp. Leave the chicken on your own table. Come eat from a table worthy of the Food Network.

But these original invitees “paid no attention.” And when pressed? They have two answers. Like the problem of the cornerstone places. Some ignore it and go off to their farm and their business. And the question must be is this good judgement? Are those worthy endeavors compared to the invite to the wedding of the Prince? But some of the invitees don’t just brush off the invite, they “seized the servants and killed them.” Like those the stone fell on. These are directly against the king.

The king here does send his army to kill them and he makes his important judgement. “Those invited were not worthy.” Hear it again in its fullness. “The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy.”

What does it mean to be unworthy? To dishonor the King or the King’s son. To show poor judgement in regards to the invitation. To judge the mundane things of our temporal existence as more important than the wedding feast is unworthy and dishonors the King. It does so just as much as killing the king’s servants. Those invited were not worthy.

**Christology**

Now all of that you we can think of as the covenant with Israel. The messiah has arrived. The wedding feast is prepared. And those invited either don’t care, or kill the servants. Now this is no different that all of Israel’s history. They would either ignore the prophets and just keep worshipping the idols, or they would kill the prophets. But this was the Son. This is the promised one. And he received the same.

So what does the King – the Father in the this case do? He tells his servants to go out to all the roads and invite as many as you can find. And they do, “both bad and good.”

The call of the gospel goes out freely. Repent and believe that this one is the Son of the Most High and that cross has paid for all our sins. That cross is your invitation to the wedding feast. And the Holy Spirit has been poured out since Pentecost on that message. The Spirit invites both bad and good. Until the wedding hall is filled with guests.

Christ has truly paid for the sins of the world. The wedding feast will have more than enough food. He’s the one who multiplied the loaves. The wedding feast will never run out of good wine. He’s the one who made it from water as Cana. And the King has called you to the feast.

**Moral**

But just like with the first invitees, there is a potential problem. The King comes to look at the guests, and he spots one without a wedding garment.”

This is the same thing as the prior unworthy invitees. Arriving without the wedding garment – call it your Sunday best - is dishonoring the King. That is the problem here. The unworthiness is poor judgement. It is a pride in our foolishness.

The King gives the man without a wedding garment a chance. “Friend, How did you get in here without one?” Notice that he calls him friend. Maybe this dishonor is unintended. After all, I sent them out and invited everyone they could find – bad and good.

A perfectly acceptable answer you can image would be, “I’m sorry, I didn’t know.” To which the King would probably turn to a servant and say, “give him one.” Or even more so, “I’m sorry, but this is the best I have.” Or maybe, “I’m sorry, but you servant’s invite reached me with no time, so I ran here in what I was wearing.” And surely the King would snap a finger and an appropriate suit would be found.

The key words in all of those probably being “I’m sorry, have grace.” But there are reasons we might feel unworthy, but aren’t. It isn’t knowledge that is being tested, because knowledge can be supplied. It isn’t wealth or works, because the King has no need of those. It isn’t time served. The ones who show up at the 11 hour receive the same reward at the first. If the call comes and you have to run to get there, run.

“But the man was speechless.” No apology. No request for mercy. Just stern silence. The unworthiness is the dishonor. And the dishonor is intended. Heck with you king and your wedding feast. I don’t need to tell you anything. What I’m wearing tells you exactly what I think of you and your son.

**Eschatological**

And just like the first invitees, those without the wedding garment. The worthy garment of believing in the King and his son, of honoring their words. Those who are unworthy are cast out. “Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness.”

The fate of physical Israel should always be instructive to the Israel of faith. You shall have no other God’s before me. If we think we are getting into the wedding feast carrying our idols, we are wrong. If we think we are getting into the wedding feast being unworthy, we are wrong. But worthiness is not our deeds, but simply are attitude. Do we believe God and his son and so give honor? Or do we ignore it or war against it?

The last words that Jesus adds I think cause a lot of consternation. “Many are called, but few are chosen.” We want to take them as Math. We want to read into them an accounting of how many are worthy and unworthy. We want to use them to judge for ourselves who makes it and who doesn’t. Of course that is exactly unworthy judgement. A dishonoring of what Jesus says.

No, instead of trying to treat it as math, we should treat it as a statement of the difficulty of the task. Many are called. In the parable the invite goes out to anyone they can find. In that sense the many is infinite. Everyone is called to the cross. But just like the parable of the soils, there are a lot of things that get in the way. The world is full of idols. Our hearts are idol factories.

It is so easy to turn the free grace of Jesus into cheap grace. To assume the gospel will always be there. Which easily slips into dishonoring the gospel. Taking it for granted. And standing speechless, when the King asks “friend, where is your wedding garment.”

The way is narrow. It is Christ alone. Christ alone who is worthy of power and glory and honor and blessing and praise. It is so easy to judge our temporal concerns as more worthy than the eternal. Many are called, but few are chosen. Lord, let us be found worthy and not speechless. Amen.