Grace and Peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

It may seem odd to talk about a wedding banquet in Palestine as the Middle East is engulfed in a war. Prayers to those who attacked the Israelis, the Palestinians and even the terrorists, that their eyes might be opened.

Jesus tells the parable of the Wedding Banquet as a way of teaching us that receiving God’s grace changes people. The late German pastor and theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, coined the phrase “cheap grace” in his famous book *The Cost of Discipleship*. Bonhoeffer describes cheap grace as a grace that requires no repentance, no sacrifice and ultimately no cross. Come on God, give eternal life but don’t expect anything from me. As wonderful as it is God’s grace is not cheap, it comes at a great cost upon the cross. Once we receive this costly grace, our lives are never the same. This grace compels us to act and calls us to bear fruit with our lives. Ultimately, we are led to share this grace with others. To continue to live in the same way after receiving this gracious invitation is not an option. So, what are we to do? We simply receive the gracious invitation to the banquet and prepare to live a new life.

Have you been invited to a wedding banquet by a member of royalty? Can you imagine how opulent that banquet would be? How about if you were told there would be fatted calves or oxen roasted for the occasion. Would that make a difference in your decision? In today’s gospel Jesus tells a parable about a wedding invitation, a banquet, and God’s grace. In the Middle East when there was a wedding the wedding is announced and everyone is invited. The party lasts until the food and the drink are gone and then the guests leave. It would bring shame if the host ran out of food and drink prematurely. When we took our refugee foster son Zeyad from Yemen to eat at a buffet, he said it would never work in his country. People would not leave until all the food was gone. Jesus teaches about a king who ultimately invites all people to a wedding banquet. He called all who were invited to the banquet but nobody came. They did not take it seriously

and went back to their everyday life. Who doesn’t come to a banquet put on by a king? What does the king do? He sends his slaves again to invite to them, telling them he has prepared oxen and fatted calves. They went about their lives after making light of the invitation and seized the slaves mistreated them and killed them. The king reacted in anger. As we will see in the Middle East, Israel will attack Hamas and the Gaza strip there will be many more deaths before this conflict is over. The king sent his troops to destroy the murderers and burn their city. So, per the king’s instructions they went out on the streets and invited whoever they found, in the bombed-out city, regardless if they were bad or good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. At first this parable seems to portray **a wide open and gracious invitation** to a wedding celebration. However, by the end it is hard not to feel sorry for the poor guy who gets a last-minute invitation but gets thrown out for not wearing the correct wedding duds! The king told the attendants to bind him and throw him out into the outer darkness. where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth Jesus tells us many are called but few are chosen.

Within the world of the story as told, beyond allegorically viewing this story, may be saying the problem with this guy is not that he is not taking things seriously enough. No, his problem is a failure to party down. The kingdom of heaven is a banquet, after all, and you’ve got to put on your party duds and get with the program. The kingdom music is playing, and it’s time to get up on the dance floor. Or, as Karl Barth, the Swiss Theologian says “In the last resort, it all boils down to the fact that the invitation is to a feast, and that he who does not obey and come accordingly, and therefore festively, declines and spurns the invitation no less than those who are unwilling to obey and appear at all.”

Matthew and his community understood themselves as faithful Jews who had responded to God’s summons to the kingdom banquet offered in honor of God’s Messiah, Jesus. But others had inexplicably rejected the great invitation, ignoring or persecuting both the prophets of old, and the new missionaries of this good news.

*Take this Bread: A Radical Conversion by Sara Miles* - Sara was an atheist and lesbian. The mysterious sacrament of communion has sustained Miles ever since, in a faith she’d scorned, in work she’d never imagined. In this astonishing story, she tells how the seeds of her conversion were sown, and what her life has been like since she took that bread.at St Gregory Presbyterian Church in San Francisco. The bread and the wine transformed her and she begin learning about what it meant to “become the bread.” Having fed people as a kitchen worker and cook, she took the "feed my sheep" commandment literally and translated it into a food pantry at St. Gregory's, even challenging the priests’ ideas of what it means to be a Christian. Here are her words: “One early, cloudy morning when I was forty-six, I walked into a church, ate a piece of bread, took a sip of wine. This was my first communion. It changed everything. The mysterious sacrament turned out to be not a symbolic wafer at all but actual food—indeed, the bread of life. I realized that what I’d been doing with my life all along was what I was meant to do: feed people. And so, I did. I took communion, I passed the bread to others, and then I kept going, compelled to find new ways to share what I’d experienced. I started a food pantry and gave away literally tons of fruit and vegetables and cereal around the same altar where I’d first received the body of Christ. I organized new pantries all over my city to provide hundreds and hundreds of hungry families with free groceries each week. . . . Holy communion knocked me upside down and forced me to deal with the impossible reality of God.”