

CONFESSION OF OUR HUMANNESS

One: God pours blessings upon us, even as we choose to go our own way.
God is present and seeks to bring healing and wholeness to all.
Therefore, I invite you to confess all that would separate you from God or one another.
Let us pray. When we have fashioned idols of our own desire or worshiped the temples
of our own tradition,

People: Lord, have mercy.

One: When have denied your invitation to the banquet of love and justice,
or failed to extend the invitation to others,

People: Christ, have mercy.

One: When we have adorned ourselves with worry rather than joy
or failed to be gentle, knowing you are near,

People: Lord, have mercy.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: Praise be to God, our sins are forgiven. God's steadfast love endures forever.

People: Praise God!

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 22:1-14

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.' But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

"But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen."

SERMON

"Come as You Are, But..."

Strange things can happen at weddings. You've all been there. The bride's faithful golden retriever walks down the aisle as the ring bearer. The best man faints and bruises his head as he falls to the floor. The wedding cake melts and slides off its perch on a 105-degree day. The pastor can't remember the name of the bride during the service. The wedding rings are nowhere to be found and a loud argument erupts between the happy couple. Grandpa tries to break out his old dance moves and ends up breaking something else instead. Strange things can happen at weddings. But I don't know if I have ever heard of a weirder wedding than the one, we read about in today's gospel.

Jesus tells a story of a king whose son is getting married. And months before the wedding, Mr. and Mrs. King have sent out an initial invitation- a kind of 1st century "save the date" announcement. But when the invited guests receive their invitation, they are not the least bit interested. And so, when the day comes for the big wedding, the guests refuse to attend? Can you believe it?

Not willing to give up on the wedding feast, Mr. King gives it another shot and sends out his servants again, this time with a detailed explanation of the wedding feast being prepared. Yet none of those invited want to attend. It's still hard to believe! In fact, some are not only disinterested in the feast,

they get antagonistic toward the king's servants. Still not wanting to give up on the wedding party, Mr. King decides to give it one more try. He asks his servants to go out one more time. And this time he asks the servants to go the edge of town and invite everyone- absolutely everyone- the good, the bad, the rich and the poor, the fit and the misfit. Absolutely everyone is invited. This invitation of the king excludes no one! All are welcome!

The point here: God's love goes out to all, God's welcome and acceptance are for all. No one is excluded- all are welcome. No matter who you are. No matter what you have done. No matter where you are in your life's journey. All are welcome in God's kingdom. All are included with God. The important word here is ALL. All are invited and all are welcome to God's banquet of grace and mercy. This is what we hear in the first part of our gospel for today.

Sometimes we may stumble with this word "all people" in some way or another. But not God! The kingdom of God is like a circle, not a line, but a circle. And for God, this is to be an ever widening circle that welcomes and includes all people.

If you go on any church web site today you will most likely find the words "All Are Welcome Here." And on many sites, you will also find the words "Come As You Are." Come as you are.... Now when my grandmother was alive, she might have sat in judgment of any woman who wasn't wearing a skirt or a dress to church. Pants on church women were just a step too far for her. But sometime in the 1990's churches got hip to the idea of becoming more seeker sensitive and so it became acceptable not just to wear pants and jeans but shorts and flip-flops- just as long as people showed up. And the good in this was that hopefully people would realize that it wasn't just about what clothes you wore but you are invited to come to worship with all of your fears, imperfections, your baggage, your struggles, your questions and your doubts and so much more. You don't have to put on a façade. You don't have to pretend that everything is going just fine in your life. Our God of welcome for all also invites us to "Come.... just as we are." What a relief! God's invitation to us is always gracious and open, with no restrictions attached.

So, in the first portion of our Gospel (verses 1-10) we hear that in the kingdom of God "all are welcome" and "come as you are." But then in the later verses, Matthew, the gospel writer, adds a rather strange addition to Jesus' parable about a guest who appeared at the royal wedding without a wedding garment. Though the invitation was extended to all, this man failed to use what the king provided because he was not wearing the proper wedding clothes. Apparently, the king gave them all wedding clothes as they arrived, because they came off the streets. But this one guest refused to put on the clothes that were fit for the wedding party that were offered to him.

And in these verses Matthew is saying to us, "Yes, all are welcome to God's banquet and we are invited to just come as we are. But we are invited not to stay that way. In responding to our invitation to God's kingdom feast we don't just simply come as we are and stay that way. As Matthew's wedding guest shows us, we have to put on our party clothes too. Because the gracious invitation and welcome of God provokes a change in us. Life in the realm of God is more than just showing up. You and I might come as we are but hopefully, we don't remain that way. Responding to God's invitation calls for a conversion on our part. A transformation. A newness of life!

But not in a stern way. Remember this is a wedding feast in the realm of God for goodness sake! If we show up to God's great feast of love and mercy, we are invited to conform our lives to the ways of the realm of God. A realm where love radiates from our every action. A realm where barriers and boundaries and divisions disappear. A realm where peacemaking and justice making are part and parcel of the party's code of conduct. We are invited to conform our lives to the way of the realm of God. Where all people have enough to eat and all have a place to lay their head at night, a place to call home. The realm of God where none live in fear of any death dealing "ism" that might inflict terror and pain in their lives.

Luther Seminary professor Carolyn Lewis says, "Indeed, it is not enough anymore to call yourself a follower of Christ and then act as if you were sound asleep during the Sermon on the Mount. It is not enough to pledge allegiance to church membership without then vowing to live out that closeness in the world. It is not enough to say you are a Christian and then stay silent when life, liberty, love and justice for all people are in jeopardy."

Because you see, God the host of the feast is not engaged in violent judgement but in the work of wiping away all the tears in this world. And we are invited to feast well at God's great banquet feast.

God today is calling us to transformation and newness. And so, do not fear this Gospel reading today. It's supposed to shock us out of our complacency and our all too easy blessed assurance. So beloved people of God, joyfully go ahead.... come as you are.... you are so welcome...and so come just as you are...but do not stay that way...put on your kingdom clothes.... put on God's party clothes of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and so much more. Because God's kingdom feast is far too magnificent for us to remain in our old rags. And it's far too wonderful for us to remain the same.

PASTORAL PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father. . .

PIANO RESPONSE

"Three-Fold-Amen"

OFFERTORY INVITATION

Moses stood in the breach between God and humanity.

It's our turn to do the same.

What will you give to extend God's love and care to others?

OFFERTORY DEDICATION

People: Gracious God, receive the gift of our lives and this offering of our service to carry your love from this place to a world in need.

This we pray in the name of Christ, whom with you and the Holy Spirit, reign in our hearts and lives, one God now and forever. Amen.

SENDING SONG

"Go Now in Peace"

BENEDICTION:

One: Go forth, strengthened to do the work of Christ,
standing in the gap,
extending the invitation to the eternal banquet,
rejoicing in God,
let your gentleness be known to everyone
and don't worry about anything.
God is with you today and ever more.

All: Amen.

POSTLUDE

Sandy Wentzloff

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All are Welcome



Remember in Prayer: Sandy Wentzloff, Dick Carlson, Ewald Keller, Bill Cowell, Eunice Gasow, and Aggie Schue. We pray for others who have been ill or are home bound and others at Oak Terrace and Golden Hearts. We pray for health and healing for all people everywhere. Pray for the ministries of our church. Pray for those serving in the military and for our local and national leaders.

If you have a prayer request or would like to receive a call from Pastor Dennis call his office at 237-2595 (leave a private voice mail) or his cell 763-258-3371

Pastor Dennis is usually in the office each Tuesday and Wednesday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. He can be reached at the office, 237-2595 (private voice mail) or his cell: 763-258-3371. E-mail: dmckee545@gmail.com • Website at listen2god.org

Giving our Gifts to God:

Tithes and Offerings can be sent to Gaylord United Church of Christ P.O. Box 385 Gaylord, MN 55334. You can also donate on our website or drop off at the church office on Wednesday between 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. Thank you for your continued support for the ministries of this church.

- ❖ **Offering plates will *not* be passed but you can still give! You can deposit your offering in the plate located at the entrance to the sanctuary.**
- ❖ Our **From the Heart Offering** in **October** goes to ***Neighbors in Need***. Deposit your donation in the Heart Basket near the Sanctuary doors.
- ❖ **Men's Fellowship meets every Wednesday at 2:00 p.m. in church in the Fireside Room.**
- ❖ **Gaylord UCC will once again be delivering Meals on Wheels during October. Volunteers are as follows:**

Oct. 12-16	Harriet Troidahl & Jan Walsh
Oct. 19-23	Howard and Fran Armstrong
Oct. 26-30	Donnie Swenson
- ❖ **Fall Cleaning Day at UCC Wednesday, October 21 beginning at 5:00 p.m.**
- ❖ **Women's Fellowship meeting Sunday, October 25 after church to discuss Christmas and Hanging of the Greens.**
- ❖ **GUCC ADVENT DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET**

On November 29 we enter the church year season of Advent. Advent is a "Season of Hope." If there ever is a time when we need hope, it is this year! Will you help nourish your fellow congregational members in hope? I need 27 people to write a devotion centered on hope of about two paragraphs in length. You might want to write about a scripture or what is renewing your hope at this time or what is the basis of your hope, or whatever you feel would be of benefit to members of the congregation. Please email me at dmckee545@gmail.com soon and share that you are willing to share a devotion. I will need to receive your devotion via email or at the church office by November 15 so that the booklet can be compiled before the beginning of Advent. Thank you for being a part of this project of Hope!

