

**Rev. George Arceneaux**

**10/15/2023**

**Pentecost 20**

Man. I am thrilled that today's Gospel is one of the good ones. I'm so happy too that we've just got one service this morning, because I think that means we may have some kids here so they can get some of the good, ol' time religion, because this morning we've got weeping and gnashing of teeth baby. We've got fire and brimstone for folks of all ages today, and what better way to get ready to celebrate the new ministry of St. Christopher's than by kicking the day off with a parable about folks getting bound up, hand and foot, and getting' thrown into that outer darkness.

Now as I rev us up, and as I play at the beginning of this sermon, I want you to know. I am sincere in saying that I like when these readings come up. I like them because these sermons where Jesus says some are chosen and some are not, that some will be glorified and some will weep and gnash their teeth, these are the stories that for a lot of people, including myself, hurt. And to my mind that means that this is sort of place where we can talk about that hurt. And, God willing, find some healing and maybe even some hope. Because while there are a lot of things we could take away from this reading today, this is what I hope motivates whatever your takeaway may be. That while Jesus says that many are called and few are chosen, I believe that text to more appropriately read: all are invited, and we each get to choose to accept that call.

Starting off, and barring the potential for religious trauma, this story is, albeit morbidly, pretty funny. The king invites folks to his sons party and when they don't show up, he responds with killing them all. He goes from zero to 60 in about two seconds, from "hey let's party" to calling Luca Brasi to make sure these guests are sleeping with the fishes. And, it doesn't get better. The king calls in everyone, the good

and the bad, and they party. But as the king is hanging out, he finds one poor, clueless shmuck, again, ONE. He doesn't call out all the bad folks, he doesn't even say this guy is bad, he just picks some poor random guy who doesn't have the right clothes on and says "how dare you not adhere to the dress code" and throws him out where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

It's funny in its extremity, but I think that's a little bit of the point. This is not an event that either really happened or really would happen. It is not a direct, one-to-one story about God and Jesus and humanity. It, and I believe all of Jesus' parables, are meant to be read with curiosity and with a sense of exploration. It is a story that means to make us wonder about our lives, to live into the mystery not only of Christ but of ourselves.

The greek, the original language of the Gospel, is as mysterious, as weird as this story. When Jesus says that many are called, that Greek word is kaleo, yes to call, but it has numerous meanings. Kaleo is to call out, like, to yell! There's a sense of invitation, that many are invited, like many are called in. And perhaps the most fun translation is that many are called, as in what you call something. When you call a cat Pidder or you call your stuffed animal Wolfy. In all three I hear that same idea though of God excitedly calling out to us to find out who we are and be that person.

Now that second part of the equation, that part about the "chosen"... that Greek is an instance in which the story today is understating the one meaning we've got on the word "*eklektoi*" which, as an aside, forms the root of our word "eclectic", which I love for informing this initially intense reading. But the word doesn't mean just chosen, but it has the implication of favorite.

Now I bring up all this greek because I hope to open up this parable that, along with a number of other such readings, has been used to say that unless you do exactly what God says, God's gonna get ya. I bring up the Greek to remind us that our interpretations of scripture are just one of so many. And that I hope the message of this morning can bring you freedom and purpose.

We are all called to the wedding banquet. God wants us there, and I'll speak for myself, I want you there too. A party is only as good as its guests, and each of you make that party so much better just by your being there. As for what it means to be favoritely chosen by God... I don't think God plays favorites with people. But I do believe that God's favorite thing is to see each of us come alive. To live meaningfully and joyfully: to grieve sincerely when we miss those we love, like we'll have opportunity to do on All Saints' Sunday on November 5<sup>th</sup>. It's to celebrate wonderfully the good of one another like we'll do at the Celebration of New Ministry tonight at 5pm. The way we find ourselves weeping and gnashing our teeth is not because God acts like a bouncer and kicks us out. It is when don't live into the purpose for which we were made. It's when we go to that wedding party and don't put on the wedding outfit, when we live our lives without living into who we're called to be. It's when Judy Marth goes through a Halloween without dressing up, or Trish joy goes through the day without smiling at someone. That weeping and gnashing of teeth comes when you are any less than the wonder you are. So hear that call to the wedding feast, hear that call to live into the meaning of your life. And choose that life you're called to, that God hopes for you and has chosen out for you to live.