

-Shepherd of the Mountains

Lutheran Church (LC-MS)

2035 S. Penrod Lane, Pinetop, AZ 85935

Ph/Fax (928) 367-1183 Email: shepherdpt @frontiernet.net

www.shepherdofthemountains.com

Pastor: R. Wayne Morton

The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

October 15, 2017

“Preoccupied”

(or, “What Not to Wear”)

Text: Matthew 22:11-12

“But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless.”

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:2).

They hog lanes.

They ignore emergency vehicles.

They treat their cars like multi-tasking way stations.

Preoccupied drivers.

I’m not the only one who’s seen it:

“RCMP Cpl. Chris Little . . . recently . . . [has] noticed a concerning, and deadly, trend: the self-preoccupied driver in a steel-and-glass bubble, oblivious to the outside world. [And] ‘The telltale texter (head down, stopped on a green light) is the least of it.’

“Little . . . has pulled over drivers brushing their teeth, applying makeup, even reading a novel - “a 300-page book, balanced on the steering wheel.

“Car-as-mobile-kitchen is another theme: he pulled over one man eating a bowl of cereal while trying to drive with his knees; another man was eating waffles from a plate with a knife” (“A new, and dangerous, kind of distracted driver,” <http://www.570news.com/2017/04/07/new-dangerous-kind-distracted-driver/>)

Distracted driving now accounts for more fatal car accidents than *impaired* driving (Ibid.)! “*Preoccupation*” has made *driving*, the most dangerous and behaviourally complex activity most people engage in on a daily basis, a cultural menace that affects not only drivers but pedestrians and neighbourhoods as the spillover effects puts cyclists on sidewalks and pedestrians at peril. When people are preoccupied - *driver* people - people *die*.

And despite what Cpl. Little has observed - despite what we ourselves have noticed - that one conspicuous *kind* of driving preoccupation - thoughtless, *aggressive* driving - is not new, says “driver psychologist” and University of Hawaii professor Leon James: “References to ‘road rage’ date to ancient Rome, which had a law against ‘furious driving.’”

When in Rome, apparently - Rome, NY, and IN, and IA, and WI, and IL, and OH, and TN, and SC, and PA, and MO, and MS, and LA, and GA, and OR, and ME, and KY, and KS, and AL.

When, not just in Rome, but in every other city in the country, too, apparently, according to the National Highway Transportation & Safety Administration (NHTSA): “In 2015 alone, 3,477 people were killed by distracted driving, and 391,000 people were injured by it. During the daytime, about 660,000 drivers were preoccupied with their cell phones while driving . . .”

Preoccupied. Already occupied. Lost in thought.

Absorbed. (Merriam-Webster)

Absorbed, distracted, faraway, removed (thesaurus.com).

Focused on a certain matter. (Taxonomy)

And it's not just the *NHTSA*! It's not just drivers of *automobiles*! [Honey, don't listen to this part; I'm sure *Allegiant* pilots - especially those on the *Peoria* run - are the *exception*!] It's the *NTSB*, the National Transportation Safety Board. Or rather, the law firm Dismukes, Young and Sumwalt (1998) reviewing NTSB data: "Nearly half of [airline] accidents involved lapses of attention associated with interruption, distraction, or *preoccupation* with one task to the exclusion of another task" (<http://aviationknowledge.wikidot.com/aviation:cockpit-interruptions-and-distractions>)

They explain: "Managing more than one task at the same time is daily work in the cockpit operation. In general, cockpit crew can efficiently deal with the demands of the concurrent tasks, but crew preoccupation with single task to the detriment of other tasks is one of the main causes for operational error in the cockpit. The most typical accident caused by crew preoccupation with one task to the detriment of another tasks is the aircraft crash of a Lockheed L1011 (Eastern Flight 401 - NY to Miami), the cause of this accident was that flight crew all focused on the landing gear indicator fault to the exclusion of monitoring the aircraft's gradual descent, which eventually caused the crash."

All three pilots, two of 10 flight attendants, and 96 of 163 passengers perished in the Florida Everglades in that one back in 1972. As I said, when people are preoccupied - *pilot* people - people *die*.

However, it's not just the *NHTSA* or the *NTSB*, it's also the *B-I-B-L-E*! It's *M-A-T-T-H-E-W*, to be precise. It's our Gospel lesson this morning. Tell me if you don't agree, the point of the parable, the *warning* of the parable, is, "When people are preoccupied - *people* people - people *die*."

Jesus is on a *roll*, isn't He? This is three in a *row*! Three *parables* in a row. Three divine insights into what "*the kingdom of heaven*" is like. Remember? It's "holy week" - and Jesus is *preoccupied*! Yes, He has just ridden triumphantly into Jerusalem *on a donkey*. And cleansed the

Temple - tossing out everyone guilty of turning that "house of prayer" into an *auction* house. And cursed the fruitless fig tree. And taught in the Temple. And been interrupted right in the middle of His teaching by "*the chief priests and the elders of the people*," demanding to know "*by what authority*" He is "*doing these things*" (Mt. 21:23).

When *those guys* refused to answer *His* question (about where John the Baptizer got *his* authority), *Jesus* refused to answer *theirs*. And turned to that one thing that had Him *preoccupied*, that one thing that was all-consuming, the "kingdom of heaven." And immediately began teaching *them* - with parables, the *first*, about the two sons the father asked to go work in the vineyard, and the *second*, about the tenants in the master's vineyard who beat his servants and killed his Son when he sent them to collect his rightful fruit.

"*These* are what that kingdom of heaven is like," Jesus told them.

"And this, too," He now adds. "It's like" - "*it may be compared to*" - "*a king, who gave a wedding feast for his son, 3 and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. 4 Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.'* 5 *But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, 6 while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. 7 The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. 8 Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.'* 10 *And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.*

And if Jesus had ended his parable *there* - as natural a place as it might *seem* - we would have missed the point completely. We would have missed, that is, the other half of the whole “*preoccupied*” story.

For the *first* to be invited - and invited *twice*, the parable makes clear - were preoccupied. Oh, technically it isn't until after the *second* invitation that we find *out*; but it's because they were already occupied, absorbed, distracted, faraway, focused on *other* matters.

And interestingly, with not *inconsequential* matters. For the excuses that the-*first-to-be-invited* give - even more-so in *Luke's* account, which is fuller than Matthew's - bear a surprising resemblance to the four reasons Moses gave in Dt. 20 (5-9) that could keep a young Israelite man “out of the draft,” that could exempt him from having to go to war: new wife, new house, new vineyard, Nervous Nellie (fearful and fainthearted).

But while those excuses might have carried some weight according to the *Law*, they clearly don't carry any weight when it comes to the *Gospel* - when it comes to ignoring God's invitation or His Christ.

The-*first-to-be-invited*, of course, were Israel. Their *first* invitation - as we saw in that parable of the tenants *last* week - was hand-delivered to them by the “*master's*” “*servants*” (Mt. 22) - the *prophets*! The Old Testament *prophets*. They were the ones the “*tenants*” in the “*owner's*” “*vineyard*” successively “*beat*,” “*killed*” and “*stoned*.”

So, in time, the “*master*” sent them “*other servants*” - John the Baptist, the disciples, and of course Jesus Himself.

“*But [when] . . . the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them, the king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.*”

Jerusalem. A.D. 70. Along with their beloved and iconic *Temple*! Some say more than a million Jews may

have died. When people are preoccupied - *people* people - people *die*. As a *political* entity, the nation effectively ceased to exist. It's *history*; you can read all about it. Start with Josephus (*History of the Jewish War*, books IV-VI), who recorded,

“That building [the temple at Jerusalem], however, God long ago had sentenced to the flames; but now . . . the fateful day had arrived, the tenth of the month Lous, the very day on which previously it had been burned by the king of Babylon One of the soldiers, neither awaiting orders nor filled with horror of so dread an undertaking . . . snatched a brand from the blazing timber [of the city] and, hoisted up by one of his fellow soldiers, flung the fiery missile through a golden window. . . . When the flame arose, a scream, as poignant as the tragedy, went up from the Jews . . . now that the object they had guarded so closely was going to ruin (*History*, VI, 250-253, quoted in *Matthew*, William Hendriksen, Baker Book House, 1973, p. 795).

8 *Then [the King] said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.'* 10 *And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good.*

Welcome to the *new* Israel, right - the *true* Israel, the children of Abraham by *faith*, not by family *tie*. Welcome to the *New Testament Church* - Jews and Gentiles alike, the whole lot of them.

So the wedding hall was filled with guests.

Only beware the *dress code*!

11 *"But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. 12 And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'* 14 *For many are called, but few are chosen."*

Ooh, ooh! So, it's like - so, I mean, the "kingdom of heaven" "may be compared to" - that TV show, *What Not to Wear*. Do you remember? Participants would be nominated by friends, family members or co-workers who could see that they were on fashion "life support." The deal was that the nominee would be given a \$5,000 gift card with which to buy a new wardrobe, if . . . if . . . he/she would turn over his or her *old* wardrobe to Clinton or Stacy - who typically, ceremoniously, then threw every single piece into the *trash can!*

"Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?"

The implication is clear; this guy doesn't belong here. He should have been *stopped*. He should have been *seen*. Either when he came through the front door - invitation in hand - somebody should have questioned him about the whole "what not to wear" to this "wedding feast" thing *or* this guy didn't come through the front door at *all!* Either he bluffed or "blew off" security, that is, or he bypassed it completely.

Either way, he was on fashion "life support." For there's preoccupation with the "things" of this life; and then there's a whole *other* kind of preoccupation - preoccupation *with yourself*. The preoccupation, as with the Jews, that somehow you are the "elect," that you're naturally righteous and holy, that you're too good to be damned, that the "whatever you have on" is good for *any* occasion.

But clearly not for this "wedding feast." Not for the "kingdom of heaven." Not for heaven itself.

And it's not simply a matter of proper dress; it's a matter of having the wrong kind of righteousness before God. It's about having turned over your old wardrobe - the "filthy rags" of your own presumed "righteousness" (Is. 64:6, KJV). It's about having "put on Christ," (Ga. 3:27), "having put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 13:14), having been clothed in the righteousness of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21), having put

on "the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ" (Phil 3:9).

Clinton Kelly from *What Not to Wear* has said, "When I got the job, I told everyone I knew that we'd probably do 10 episodes, get canceled and I'd go crawling back to my old job in magazine publishing. So, I'm more surprised than anyone that we've lasted this long. At first I thought the essence of the show was making snarky remarks about people's outfits, but as it turns out, 'WNTW' is about taking stock of who you are and communicating that non-verbally to the rest of the world."

Brothers and sisters in Christ, having a proper "wedding garment" at the "wedding feast" of the "King's" "Son" is about taking stock of who you are and communicating that - verbally *and non-verbally* - in what you say *and* in what you do - to the rest of the world!

Let *that* now be *your* preoccupation, fellow wedding-goers - for it certainly is *His*. Jesus continues to be preoccupied with inviting to the banquet. He continues to send His invitation through word and sacrament and sacrament, through holy word, and holy wine and wafer, and holy water: "Come to the wedding feast" (v. 4).

And preoccupation is the only way, for the challenge is that while "many are called" - indeed, *all* are called, all are *invited* - "few are chosen." Few will *not* (!) be so preoccupied so as either to, one, flatly dismiss the invitation, or, two, try to show up on their own terms, dressed in, ah, *you* know, what *not* to wear.

May God so grant you that preoccupation, for Jesus sake, and for the sake of a world that still desperately needs to hear and receive His invitation.

Amen.