

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2026
TWENTIETH SUNDAY
AFTER PENTECOST
MATTHEW 22:1-14
“THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN INVITED”

St. John United Church of Christ

10207 Lincoln Trail Fairview Heights, IL

Telephone 618-397-6323

e-mail– stjohnuccfairview@gmail.com

Website: www.stjohnfairview.org

Rev. Rosemary Captain

revrosemarycaptain@gmail.com

Organist/Pianist – Sharon Banjavcic

Liturgy – Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Lindsay

Ushers –

(NCH) New Century Hymnal - CCLI LICENSE #11164431

*Please stand if comfortably able.

Respond with words in bold print.

Bible translation – CEB Common English Bible

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER CONCERNS:

THE BELL IS RUNG:

PRELUDE: “Trust and Obey” Stewart Landon

PENNIES FOR MISSION:

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

(inspired by Psalm 106)

One: Who can express the mighty work of the Holy One?

Many: We who gather praise the Holy One for God is good. God’s steadfast love endures forever!

One: Who can proclaim the redemptive acts of the Holy One?

Many: We who gather praise the Holy One for justice and righteousness. God shows favor and mercy toward the people.

One: Who can declare the wondrous and awesome deeds of the Holy One?

Many: We who gather praise the Holy One! Praise the Holy One!

***INVOCATION:**

Holy Love, your presence is our sanctuary. We gather at your invitation to be in community with you and one another. Enliven our hearts. Nourish our spirits. Encourage our souls. Expand our minds. We seek truth and righteousness. We thirst to give and receive compassion and grace. Let us feast on your word, release our concerns in prayer, and offer our praise in thanksgiving. Be glorified among us, O God, our Redeemer, Host, and Friend. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: 6 “Sing Praise to God, Our Highest Good”**

***UNISON PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**

Holy One, we acknowledge that you have modeled a way of being in the world that we struggle to adopt. You invite us to love the neighbor we do not know and the enemy that we do. We encourage us to prioritize the marginalized and center the oppressed even when our own needs overwhelm us. You invite us into your kingdom, and the cost of discipleship sometimes seems to be more than we can afford. Holy One, we need strength and hope for the journey. Let your surpassing peace enable us to pursue a worthy and pleasing life. Amen.

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

Siblings in Christ, the Holy One is near and responds to your prayer. Remember, “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. As for the things that you have learned and received and heard and noticed in me, do them, and the God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:8-9)

***GLORIA:**

Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here. (repeat twice)
(end) One God always here. One God always here.

SCRIPTURE LESSONS

OLD TESTAMENT: Exodus 32:1-14

Worshipping the gold bull calf

32 The people saw that Moses was taking a long time to come down from the mountain. They gathered around Aaron and said to him, “Come on! Make us gods^[a] who can lead us. As for this man Moses who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we don’t have a clue what has happened to him.”

² Aaron said to them, “All right, take out the gold rings from the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” ³ So all the people took out the gold rings from their ears and brought them to Aaron. ⁴ He collected them and tied them up in a cloth. Then he made a metal image of a bull calf, and the people declared, “These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!”

⁵ When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf. Then Aaron announced, “Tomorrow will be a festival to the Lord!” ⁶ They got up early the next day and offered up entirely burned offerings and brought well-being

sacrifices. The people sat down to eat and drink and then got up to celebrate.

⁷ The Lord spoke to Moses: “Hurry up and go down! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, are ruining everything! ⁸ They’ve already abandoned the path that I commanded. They have made a metal bull calf for themselves. They’ve bowed down to it and offered sacrifices to it and declared, ‘These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’” ⁹ The Lord said to Moses, “I’ve been watching these people, and I’ve seen how stubborn they are.

¹⁰ Now leave me alone! Let my fury burn and devour them. Then I’ll make a great nation out of you.”

¹¹ But Moses pleaded with the Lord his God, “Lord, why does your fury burn against your own people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and amazing force? ¹² Why should the Egyptians say, ‘He had an evil plan to take the people out and kill them in the mountains and so wipe them off the earth’? Calm down your fierce anger. Change your mind about doing terrible things to your own people. ¹³ Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, whom you yourself promised, ‘I’ll make your descendants as many as the stars in the sky. And I’ve promised to give your descendants this whole land to possess for all time.’” ¹⁴ Then the Lord changed his mind about the terrible things he said he would do to his people.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 106 Page 692 - 693

EPISTLE LESSON: Acts 8:14-25

¹⁴ When word reached the apostles in Jerusalem that Samaria had accepted God’s word, they commissioned Peter and John to go to Samaria. ¹⁵ Peter and John went down to Samaria where they prayed that the new believers would receive the Holy Spirit. (¹⁶ This was because the Holy Spirit had not yet fallen on any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) ¹⁷ So Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸ When Simon perceived that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money. ¹⁹ He said, “Give me this authority too so that anyone on whom I lay my hands will receive the Holy Spirit.”

²⁰ Peter responded, “May your money be condemned to hell along with you because you believed you could buy God’s gift with money! ²¹ You can have no part or share in God’s word because your heart isn’t right with God.

²² Therefore, change your heart and life! Turn from your wickedness! Plead with the Lord in the hope that your wicked intent can be forgiven, ²³ for I see that your bitterness has poisoned you and evil has you in chains.”

²⁴ Simon replied, “All of you, please, plead to the Lord for me so that nothing of what you have said will happen to

me!” ²⁵ After the apostles had testified and proclaimed the Lord’s word, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the good news to many Samaritan villages along the way.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 22:1-14**

Parable of the wedding party

22 Jesus responded by speaking again in parables: ² “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding party for his son. ³ He sent his servants to call those invited to the wedding party. But they didn’t want to come. ⁴ Again he sent other servants and said to them, ‘Tell those who have been invited, “Look, the meal is all prepared. I’ve butchered the oxen and the fattened cattle. Now everything’s ready. Come to the wedding party!”’ ⁵ But they paid no attention and went away—some to their fields, others to their businesses. ⁶ The rest of them grabbed his servants, abused them, and killed them.

⁷ “The king was angry. He sent his soldiers to destroy those murderers and set their city on fire. ⁸ Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding party is prepared, but those who were invited weren’t worthy. ⁹ Therefore, go to the roads on the edge of town and invite everyone you find to the wedding party.’

¹⁰ “Then those servants went to the roads and gathered everyone they found, both evil and good. The wedding party was full of guests. ¹¹ Now when the king came in

and saw the guests, he spotted a man who wasn’t wearing wedding clothes. ¹² He said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ But he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to his servants, ‘Tie his hands and feet and throw him out into the farthest darkness. People there will be weeping and grinding their teeth.’

¹⁴ “Many people are invited, but few people are chosen.”

MESSAGE: “The Parable About the Wedding Feast”

By now you probably know that I’m a “Pollyanna”. Everything about Jesus is love, love. So when I read a Bible like we have today, I get upset. “Not my Jesus! Jesus wouldn’t say something like, “many are called but few are chosen”. Jesus loves everyone! I want to hear a nice story about God throwing a party open to everyone; being inclusive. I don’t want to know about judgment on the wicked or about demanding standards of holiness, or about weeping and gnashing of teeth. Doesn’t the Bible say that God will wipe away every tear from every eye?

Well, yes, it does, but you have to see that in its proper setting (Revelation 21:4, quoting Isaiah 25:8) to understand it. It doesn’t mean that God will act like a soothing parent setting a child back to sleep after a nightmare. God wants us to be grown up, not babies, and part of being grown up is that we learn that actions have consequences, that moral choices matter, and that

real human life isn't like a board game where even if we do badly the pieces get put back in the box at the end of the day and we can start again tomorrow. The great, deep mystery of God's forgiveness isn't the same as saying that whatever we do isn't really important because it'll all work out somehow. Like a movie where the couple always gets back together again.

This is not a lesson we want to learn. Often people dislike this parable because it teaches it. Just wait til we get to the end where the man gets thrown out because he doesn't have a wedding suit on.

Of course, when Jesus told the parable it had a particular point and focus. Its possible that verse 7, ⁷ "The king was angry. He sent his soldiers to destroy those murderers and set their city on fire." was added later.; perhaps by Matthew himself, so that his readers would make the connection between what Jesus was saying and the terrible events of AD 70 when the temple was destroyed by the Romans when the Jews attempted a civil war.

The parable follows straight on from the devastating story of the wicked tenant farmers in chapter 21, and slams the point home. Everyone would know what a story about a landowner with a vineyard was referring to ; equally everyone in Jesus' day would know the point of a story about a king throwing a wedding party for his son.

Israel's leaders in Jesus' day, and the many people who followed them, were like guests invited to a wedding – God's wedding party, the party God was throwing for his Son. But they had refused. Galilee had refused, for the most part; think back to Jesus' sad warnings in Chapter 11. Now Jerusalem was refusing the invitation as well. God was planning the great party for which they had waited so long. The Messiah was here, and they didn't want to know. They abused and killed the prophets who had tried to tell them about it, and the result was that their city would be destroyed.

But now for the good news – though it wasn't good news for the people who were originally invited. God was sending out new messengers to the wrong parts of town, to tell everyone and anyone to come to the party. And they came in droves. In Matthew's Gospel those were the tax-collectors, the prostitutes, the riff-raff, the nobodies, the blind and lame, the people who thought they'd been forgotten. They were thrilled that God's message was for them after all.

BUT HERE COMES THE CATCH.

But there was a difference between this wide-open invitation and the message so many want to hear today. I'm going to pause here for a minute. In the Bible, when we read things like Jesus blessing the people who are not exactly angels, such as the prostitutes. Is Jesus condoning their behavior? Think about that for a

minute. Sometimes we want to hear that everyone is all right exactly as they are; that God loves us as we are and doesn't want us to change.

People often say this when they want to justify particular types of behavior, but the argument doesn't work. For example, when the blind and the lame came to Jesus, he didn't say, "You're all right as you are. " No. Jesus healed them. Jesus changed them. He did not leave them as they were. Instead, his love reached them where they were, but his love refused to let them stay as they were. Their lives were transformed, healed, changed.

I don't think anyone really believes that God wants everyone to stay exactly as they are. God loves serial killers and child molesters. But the point of God's love is that God wants them to change. He hates what they're doing and the effect it has on everyone else. Repentance is required to stay at the party.

That is the point of the end of the story, which is otherwise very puzzling. The point of the parable is that Jesus is telling the truth, the truth that political and religious leaders so often like to hide; the truth that God's kingdom is a kingdom in which love and justice and truth and mercy and holiness reign unhindered. **THESE ARE THE CLOTHES YOU NEED TO WEAR FOR THE WEDDING PARTY.** If you refuse to put on love, justice, truth, mercy, and holiness, you are saying you don't

want to stay at the party. This is the reality. Can we wear those garments everyday? If not, God might never invite us to God's party again. Amen.

ST JOHN CHOIR "Spirit of Praise" Michael Ryan

PASTORAL PRAYER:

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

PRAYER RESPONSE: 773

Remember me, remember me.

O Jesus, remember me.

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

Generosity serves as a response to the Holy One's abundant creation, trustworthy provision, and compassionate care. When we give, we accept that God has given more than enough for us to share, all have a place of belonging in God's realm, and making room affirms our commitment to God's reign. Let us give in faith, trust, gratitude, and love.

OFFERTORY: "Jesus Is Calling" Franklin Ritter

***DOXOLOGY:**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

Praise God, all creatures here below;

Praise God above you heavenly host;

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen

***UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION AND
THANKSGIVING:**

**Generous God, receive our offerings as acceptance to
your invitation to the kingdom life. May they be used
to spread abundance, generate hope, and meet needs.
Bless us as we give to grow in generosity, gratitude,
and grace. We give thanks for this opportunity to
participate in your kingdom come and your will be
done in our communities and world. Amen.**

***CLOSING HYMN: 419 “Now Thank We All Our God”**

***BENEDICTION:**

**As you go, take the invitation with you...
To receive and give hospitality.
May you know God and be known by God.
May the table and feast of God’s kingdom expand
As you share the invitation of good news
In the world and for the glory of God.**

***BENEDICTION RESPONSE: 571**

**O God of Love, O God of Peace
Make wars throughout the world to cease.
The wrath of human wrong restrain;
Give peace, O God, give peace again.**

THE BELL IS RUNG:

POSTLUDE: “Triumphal March” Edward Grieg

PRAYER LIST: Cindy Jablonski, Carol Bulva, Jim Warning,
Kim Holmes, Nancy Wagner, Becky Ballard, Russ
Hartmann, Marilyn Paul, Mary Lou and Urban Baum,
Pam and Syd Safriet, Yvonne Weber, Jackie Canterbury,
Wayne Huss, our Beloved Country.