

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 23) – October 11, 2026

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.”

- Matthew 22:11-14 -

The parable of the wedding feast is about God’s calling in light of election and predestination. As Christians proclaim the gospel, there is a call that goes out to all. This can be called a “general call” due to its universal scope, or an “external call” because it does not necessarily touch the heart. However, through the work of the Holy Spirit, this gospel proclamation reaches the hearts of particular individuals and becomes effectual in the hearts of God’s elect. Thus, the calling of the Spirit, may be called a “particular call”, an “internal call” or an “effectual call” to distinguish it from the general and external call of the preacher.

These terms may sound strange to Lutheran ears. However, even if the terminology is strange, the substance should not be. As shown by Article V of the Augsburg Confession, Lutheran theology fully accords with the description given above: “Through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given. He works faith, when and where it pleases God, in those who hear the good news that God justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ’s sake.”

Because the human heart is bound in sin, it cannot free itself. It can’t accept the gospel offer until it is regenerated by the Holy Spirit. After all, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14). Moreover, “the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed it cannot (Romans 8:7).” On its own, therefore, the human will cannot make a “decision for Christ” in order to be born again. Rather, it must first be born again to make a decision for Christ!

This might lead some to despair. If salvation is 100% God’s work, why evangelize? The answer is that God works through means, including our prayers and our witness. Because God’s word is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12), we may be sure that God works through His word as we witness to others. Consequently, we proclaim the gospel in complete confidence that God will work “when and where it pleases” Him to quicken the hearts of those whom He has chosen.