

A SEAT AT THE BRIDEGROOM'S FEAST

By Melissa Merrill

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Going to a wedding reception alone isn't always comfortable. But when an old friend invited me to his wedding dinner, I knew I couldn't miss the opportunity to celebrate with him and his new bride.

The day of the wedding, I arrived just before dinner started. I spotted an empty seat and asked one of the women at the table if it were taken.

"Are you *supposed* to be here?" she questioned, eyeing me suspiciously.

I had no idea what prompted the question—or the manner in which she asked it. There wasn't someone checking a guest list. The seating wasn't prearranged. I was on time and dressed appropriately. What could be the problem?

I smiled nervously. "I'm a friend of the groom," I assured her. She nodded, so I sat down and tried to strike up friendly conversation with the six couples at the table. Whatever discomfort I had felt before was magnified given the "welcome" I'd received. I desperately scanned the room for someone—anyone—I knew, but aside from the groom, there wasn't a familiar face anywhere.

But then it happened. My friend, seated next to his bride at the front of the crowded hall, stood. As he did so, he saw me on the opposite side of the room. He paused, smiled, and placed his hand over his heart as if to say, "Thank you for coming. I know you sacrificed to be here. It means so much that you're with us."



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A feeling of relief and happiness washed over me. Whatever anyone else thought, in the groom's estimation, I belonged. I smiled as I mirrored his gesture. I hoped my friend knew how much I wanted to celebrate and share in his and his wife's joy. Whatever social awkwardness I had felt was gone in that 10-second exchange, and I spent the rest of the evening infused with confidence.

Days later, in preparing to teach a Relief Society lesson, I studied Matthew 22 and read of a king preparing a marriage feast for his son, who represents the Savior. About these verses of scripture, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught: "Those who keep the commandments of the Lord and walk in His statutes to the end, are the only individuals

permitted to sit at this glorious feast. . . . Those who have kept the faith will be crowned with a crown of righteousness; be clothed in white raiment; be admitted to the marriage feast; be free from every affliction, and reign with Christ on the earth."¹ That promise is powerful anytime, but it was especially so because of my experience earlier that week.

As I taught the lesson, I realized that obedience is the only requirement for accepting an invitation from Jesus Christ to rejoice with Him, to have a place at His feast. And that feast is one at which guests need never feel insecure because they *do* belong. Although I am as yet far from perfect in my obedience, I hope one day to qualify to meet the Bridegroom and with hand over heart—a heart submitted to His will—say, "I'm so happy to be here." ■

NOTE

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 165, 166.