

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost – 2023

Isaiah 25:6-9

Philippians 4:4-13

Matthew 22:1-14

God loves to throw a party. Eating with sinners is what Christ does. Just conjure up the catalogue of dinner parties, suppers, wedding feasts, and picnics which litter the pages of Christ's life. There's the marriage banquet at Cana where the Lord turned water into wine (John 2:1-11), the Last Supper in the Upper Room (Matthew 26:26-29), the meal at Emmaus on Easter evening (Luke 24:13-35), and the breakfast of broiled fish by the Sea of Tiberias after Jesus rose from the dead (John 21:1-14). Jesus broke bread with the short, honest-crook Zacchaeus, a tax collector (Luke 19:1-10). Matthew, another tax collector, threw a dinner party for Jesus as well. Sinners were the guests and that flamed out the religiously pure (Matthew 9:9-13). The Christ fed a boatload of people five using only five loaves and two fish (Matthew 14:14-21). Jesus tells a story of a father who receives back his prodigal son and then throws a blowout to celebrate: "bring the fattened calf and kill it and let us celebrate" (Luke 15:23).

God loves to throw a party. He's fairly bummed when people say, "No thanks." The world has been summoned to a party. Who will come? Jesus tells a pretty graphic parable. It starts off happy enough. A proud father; a son who has won himself a bride; a wedding feast that promises to be an extraordinarily good time and an invitation; those are the building blocks of a story about the kingdom of heaven. Jesus tells a good story. You better believe that this story is exactly how things are, spiritually. This isn't Aesop's fables or Mother Goose or Dr. Seuss – this is bedrock reality, this is salvation and judgment and eternity. Jesus is putting it to you pretty straight. Should you, or anyone else, choose to test God's resolve in this matter you are looking at an outcome that will have a finality beyond your comprehension and you will not be counting the days or the months or the years but millenniums in a place with no doors.

Let's handle this parable using four points.

First, God the Father is super proud of His Son. Supremely obedient, Jesus laid down His life as a sacrifice for those who are imperiled by their sin. Jesus' love was poured out for His Father and His neighbor throughout His life. The enormity of the world's sin was placed on His shoulders and He bore it. All glory is located at Calvary as the Holy Son of God is mocked by those He came to save, as He is pierced by those He created in His image, as He is spit upon and cursed and blasphemed by those He gladly gives His life for. The Father *sees* His Son's magnificence. Jesus claimed the church as His bride as He gave Himself to the whip, the thorns, the spikes and ultimately, to death. "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased." Jesus redeemed humanity from death and hell and the Father is overjoyed in His Son. And the Father throws a party of salvation.

Second, everyone is invited. The bad and the good, the near and the far, the erudite and the simple, male and female, Greek and Jew, city and farm, those who live by the desert and those who live by the sea – the wide world is invited. We make disciples of all nations because that is God's desire, that's who God's invited. We evangelize high and low, we beat the bushes in the north and the south, we speak the word in season and out of season just to invite people off the streets and into the kingdom, into the party, the banquet hall, the wedding feast. Y'all come;

that's our motto. Everyone, everyone, everyone – cause we all have the same need and we all have the same God (there is only one) and we all are loved and we all are invited.

Thirdly, those who snub the Son, those who have others things to do and thus believe that they can go on their merry way because there's not a tab at the end of life and someone has to pay, well, those folks are dead wrong. Snubbing the marriage banquet is akin to a direct rejection of the Son and faith is completely absent. But everyone is invited. You don't have to get your act together before coming to the banquet but the world, sadly, is full of fools who won't believe a good thing when they hear it. Free grace, undying love, and unqualified acceptance might as well be a fifteen foot crocodile to some folks. Judgment is going to have the final word and that judgment will be a thunderclap on those who reject the banquet invitation.

Fourthly, the party is now. Yes, there's a marriage banquet in heaven, waiting for you. But that banquet is inextricably tied to our altar, tied to Christ's body and blood, tied to this Divine Service. Christ *paid* for this Divine Service with His life. Christ *paid* for your forgiveness with His life. Christ *paid* for your liberation from sin, your favor before the Father, your in-grafting into the kingdom of heaven. The Father wants His grace and His Son to be celebrated now.

You know that your life has been elevated by the word of the Gospel. You are here because you know that Christ died for yours sins and that life has no meaning apart from His death and resurrection. You know that you are a participant in the gifts of salvation... now. You are holy because you have been washed in His blood and He is the One who washed you. You know that death has been swallowed up forever by a crucified and risen Savior. Life is the victor. Death is a defeated enemy. Heaven awaits. And the Father throws a party for His Son. We sing in this place because this Son and our life in Him are worth celebrating. Ellie Bea (baptized today) is part of our celebration. Life breaks out this day as she is clothed in the garment of Christ. Ellie Bea is in the party. The Kingdom of Heaven is in this house. No merits of our own; we are saved by grace, which is the wedding garment that Ellie wears, that you wear.

Who will come? Who will gladly come to this Divine party, the wedding feast of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world? Who will come? Those who need Christ will come. Those who trust Christ and His death for their redemption will come. Those who know, and are honest enough to confess, that they are not righteous in and of themselves and that they need God's mercy; they will come. And come they have. From north and south and east and west, sinners have come to the banquet. Rich and poor, young and old, black, yellow, brown, red, and white – so very many have come into the kingdom of heaven. And more are coming still. It's glorious in our Father's eyes; glorious. Joy and camaraderie and contentment and purpose and hope and virtue and love and peace are found in Christ's church. The wedding hall is going to be full. God wants you see it now, in this holy house, and how glorious we are in His eyes. His Son paid for all this, all that you have, all that you will ever have.

One day, you will hear these words: "Now has come the marriage banquet of the Lamb in His Kingdom" (Revelation 19:6-9). Your heart will soar like a hawk. See its leading edge here. See its leading edge now... and rejoice.