

The Second Sunday after Trinity
St. Luke 14:16-24

Prayer: O Lord God, heavenly Father: we give thanks to You that through Your holy word You have called us to Your great supper, and we implore You to enliven our hearts by Your Holy Spirit, so that we do not hear Your word without fruit, but that we may prepare ourselves rightly for Your kingdom and not allow ourselves to be hindered by any worldly care; through Your beloved Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen.

In the Name of the One who is Himself both Host and Feast, Dear Fellow Redeemed;

It is obvious from looking at our Gospel lesson for this morning that we are coming in on the middle of something. "Jesus replied," it begins, and then continues with the parable that we have before us. In fact, what we coming in to the middle of with our text is a banquet. Jesus had been invited to eat at the home of one of the rulers of the Pharisees, and while there had occasion to teach about humility. It was on this occasion that Jesus spoke those familiar words, *"Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted"* (St Luke 14:11) and then He turns to the host of this banquet and says, *"When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just"* (St Luke 14:12-14). Now Jesus wasn't saying he should never have his friends over for dinner, but was making the point that usually we are only good to those who we know will be good back to us, when really we should show kindness to all people, even those who we think don't deserve our kindness, because that is the will of God.

Still, this is pretty risqué stuff, potentially offensive when spoken to the guy who invited you to his house. You can imagine the embarrassing silence in the room following those words, and so to break that embarrassed silence and avoid any further embarrassment another guest says something he is sure everyone can agree on and thus turn this gathering back into a party rather than a debate. Picking up on what Jesus said about being “blessed at the resurrection of the just” he says “*Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!*” (St Luke 14:15). In other words, Whatever your opinion, won't it be nice when we are all together in heaven, enjoying God's hospitality, and it is to these words that Jesus replied with the parable before us. Jesus knew the man had meant well and had spoken because he was worried about the host being offended. Thus in the parable Jesus says, “You are so worried about this host being offending, what of the Host who gave the invitation to eat bread in the kingdom of God?”

Blessed Are They Who Hear the Invitation of God And Keep It

No one would disagree that heaven is a wonderful place and that all there will be happy. The problem, Jesus says, is that not all who were invited will be there. Not everyone will be in heaven. And why? Is it because God just didn't like them? Or because they were such evil, rotten people that God would not have them? Is it because they did things that just could not be forgiven? No, says Jesus, the problem is not with the Host. He is sincere in His invitation, and even sends out servants to issue the invitation again. The reason not at all will be at the feast of the kingdom of God lies with the guests. They are like people who have been invited to a banquet but then refuse to come. They received the invitation, they probably even had intentions of

coming at one time, but then something happened and the invitation just didn't seem as important as it once did. I have bought a field. I've just bought some oxen. I just got married. Please excuse me, I cannot come.

It is interesting to note that in each case it is something good that happens; the person's life has improved somehow and this is the reason they cannot come. Things were going so well in their lives that the invitation to the banquet just didn't seem as important as it once did. In essence, each person is saying, "It is very nice that God should invite me to spend time with Him, but I am so busy right now, my life is so hectic. Maybe when things slow down a little I can make some time for things like church." Or worse, "It is very nice that God should invite me, but frankly I'm doing pretty well on my own and so I'm not clear on how this really benefits me. I really don't think this is something I need."

You remember that this whole thing began as a lesson on pride and humility, and we see now that in this parable Jesus never left that topic. Ultimately the reason those who are invited don't come to the banquet is because they are too proud. They look at what the host is offering them and say, "That used to look pretty good, but not anymore. But this land, this new property, my relationships, these things give me what is really important, what I really need. Come back when you have something better to offer, because what You have right now isn't good enough for me."

Can you imagine saying that to God? What You're offering to me just doesn't meet my standards, come back when You can give me something better? What was worse was that everyone in that room knew that Jesus was talking about them. They

were the ones whom God had invited, but had spurned the invitation because they rejected what God offered to them in the person of His Son. God had offered them someone to take on the debt of their sin and pay for it by offering to God a perfect life and paying for the sins of the world by offering that life on the cross. But when Jesus came with that message, many people rejected it. They didn't like all that talk about sin, because they didn't think they were all that bad. They didn't need a Savior, they needed someone to simply show them the way to God, maybe give them a few pointers on living right, but ultimately, they would take at least some of the credit of getting to heaven.

And sadly, we all too often see ourselves and our attitudes and our pride reflected by those guests in the parable who reject the invitation. God sends out His invitation to heaven to all people. Many of you have perhaps heard the passage from 1 Timothy 2:3-4, *"God our Savior...desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."* And in Isaiah God says, *"Turn to Me and be saved all the ends of the earth"* (Isaiah 45:22). When God says He wishes all to be saved, He means all. There is nothing exclusionary about the Gospel, nor is there anything dishonest in God's gracious invitation, as if God were saying, *"Sure, what I say is I want all to be saved, but secretly I have in mind only a select few, because really I want most of the people who hear the Gospel to go to hell."* In fact, it is to prove the sincerity of the call of the Gospel that God offers His forgiveness in things like Baptism and the Lord's Supper. When we baptize, God tells us we may be certain that faith is given and sins are forgiven. *"Baptism...now saves you"* (1 Peter 3:21) writes the Apostle Peter. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper,

we hear our Lord say, "This is My Body, This is My Blood. These are given for the forgiveness of your sins. You may be certain of it, for I have declared it to be."

And yet, as sincere as God is in His declaration that our sins are forgiven, we are very often shallow in our faith. We have heard the invitation, but soon our reaction becomes like those in the parable: "I appreciate the offer, but I am so busy right now, I just don't have time for church on Sundays, much less private devotions. I need some private time to relax. And I can't come on Monday evenings because I'm so tired after work, and I need time to relax. Or, What You're offering doesn't seem to fill my needs at the moment. My life is going well, sin doesn't seem to be that much of a problem, death is far off in the future. Please excuse me. Thanks, but no thanks."

Very often we find ourselves as self-sufficient, as self-satisfied, as self-righteous as those to whom Jesus told this parable. Why do I need that gracious promise of forgiveness when I just sort of feel that I'm a pretty good person anyway, and God is going to accept me?

And if, like the Pharisees to whom Jesus told this parable, we find ourselves condemned by this parable, then we find ourselves in the position of the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. We find ourselves and our character and our abilities lacking, but yet before us stands our Savior with the earnest invitation to feast on the Bread of Life come down from heaven. The truth is that you have scorned God's invitation, but God has not spurned you. He continues to extend to you the invitation to believe the message of the Gospel. God still desires you to be saved, He still declares your sins to be forgiven, He still says to you, "Come, for everything is now ready."

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied” (St Matthew 5:6).

As Christians, we always seem to be looking for ways to graduate from our faith, from a total and complete dependence upon God. Today we celebrate the graduation of these students. They are leaving behind elementary school and going on to high school where they will be expected to be more independent, to rely less on their teachers and more on themselves. Four years from now, God willing, they will go on to college they will become even more independent of teachers and parents. Eventually they will become totally self-sufficient, and when they make their first million they can say, “I got a good start at Parkland Lutheran School, but ultimately it was my hard work and determination that got me where I am today,” and they will be completely right, and we would be wrong to take too much credit for their success.

Yet Church is not an elementary school, and faith in Christ is not a subject we can master and then move on. If anything, as we grow in our faith we become more and more aware of how sinful we are, and dependent we are on Christ. Parents and teachers wish to grow children into independence, God, our heavenly Father, desires that we grow into greater dependence upon Him, that we may always hear the voice of our gracious Host calling us to His banquet, and recognizing our need continue to accept His gracious invitation. To God all praise and Glory! Amen.

Gloria Patri...

SDG