

Pastor T.C. Arnold
20th Sunday after Trinity (Stewardship Sunday)
Matthew 22:1-14
October 13th, 2013

Gathering around a festive meal is usually cause for a great celebration. Festive meals are happy times. Banquets almost always presuppose that there will be a joyful time to be had by all. There's usually a lot of laughing and jubilation. That assumption is no different with a wedding feast – the one we hear about in the parable Jesus told in the Gospel text. At this banquet, there is really something to celebrate. Back in the times of Jesus, wedding banquets were a really big deal and they would usually go on for days. Now that's the way to celebrate.

Jesus uses the “a meal” other times in the Bible to illustrate a particular point. While the various parables may have slightly different means from each other, we can learn important things from elements that are almost always universal. Let's take a look... Here are some things to think about in this story:

The meal itself speaks about the joy and reunion of God's people. Whether it be the prodigal son who returns home or a king celebrating his son's wedding, a meal must be prepared and people gathered at the common table.

A second universal is to note that the master, the king, the father – our Heavenly Father, is always the one to host the meal.

A third thing to note is that virtually always there are servants of some sort who are almost hidden characters in the story – but always play an important role.

Fourth, one frequently finds guests who either refuse to come and eat or at best reluctant to the point of refusing to do so.

And lastly, there occurs with considerable regularity in these parables, as in today's text, a scouring of the countryside for people to fill the seats of those who refuse to come. The seats are inevitably filled, but not with the people expected to fill them. And here, beloved in the Lord, is where you join the banquet. Here is where you get your seat. It's an undeserved seat and you didn't even have to invite yourself. Hard to believe, isn't it? Hard to believe that you and I are on the guest list. For that reason, you might have a few questions to ask the one who is putting on this fabulous shin-dig.

Is the Master serious when He invites us? Doesn't He know that deep down we are His enemies? Doesn't He know that at times we have acted like He doesn't matter – or – maybe we have ignored His call to service? Doesn't the Master know, or has He forgotten, that time when it came for us to either honor God with our life or choose the way that suits us best, and we went with what put us first instead of God? Doesn't the host of this great banquet know what we have said, what we have done, how we have acted and how we have not acted when He calls us to work? He's joking, right? He must be up to something.

We could see how we might feel this way. Is He using this whole banquet thing as a big set-up to spite us, to judge us, to pour His wrath upon us? That question might seem outrageous, but it is not. I have to tell you, I do encounter people from time to time who are afraid to get too close to God. They are afraid of what He might do to them. They are afraid that if they approach the throne of grace, they will be rejected. We might think this is an irrational fear. However, it has kept more than one person away from the Lord's Table of grace. At times, our fear is that if we come before

the Lord with our sins, with our stain-filled lives, then perhaps the people around me who sit at this banquet today, will think I'm a hypocrite... because they know me.

Beloved, this banquet feast of God's Word and free forgiveness is for those the Master of the feast would tell His servants to go out, invite, and bring in. *"He said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good."* The servants "gathered" all whom they found. And, in case you had any question of what kind of people they found, what their character was, how acceptable to God they were... the text tells us they gathered ALL whom they found, both good and bad.

God's gracious invitation to the feast that never ends does not discriminate. Thank God. Though any of us could feel unworthy to approach the throne of grace, God sends His servants to bring us to the wedding feast. Heed this invitation. Do not ignore it. Do not feel as if you are unworthy to come before the Lord. We are all unworthy to eat of the feast provided by the Lord. Only by virtue of the grace of God, the blood of Jesus, are we made worthy.

There is another reason why those invited don't come to the feast – and this, perhaps, affects all of us from time to time as well. We feel as if we don't need to eat. "Why come when there is so much other food in different places," we might think. Why come to this table when there is a table of greater desire somewhere else. Why come to this table and heed this invitation when I really don't need to eat of this food, I can eat wherever I want to eat.

But that food will not fill you up. It will only leave you wanting and never satisfy. At this feast here in this place we are filled with the bread of life. This is the feast of real sustenance.

Years ago a preacher in a small town summoned the townsfolk to meet in the town square. The merchant resented having to leave his business. The housewife protested against having to drag the kids out of the house. The lawyer and the doctor both hated the fact that they were going to miss appointments. But they gathered anyway. When all were present, the preacher said, "I wish to announce that there is still a God in the world and your church is still the place where we gather to meet him and each other." That was all he said. They were so busy with everything else in life, they had forgotten about their Lord. They forgot about the invitation to the banquet feast.

This place, Christ Lutheran, is your place to be. It runs not because of me and those on staff. But because of you. Your work here is essential. Your time, talent and treasures are needed. I say that boldly and as a matter of fact. Without you there is a God, there is a feast, there is the church, but there is no Christ Lutheran on the corner of 72nd St. and 9 Hwy. This is God's Church, but you make it up. You are essential. And at the risk of being too straight forward... I'm going to risk it anyway. Your church needs you. It needs you to serve and, quite frankly, it needs you to give. On a personal note, I don't stand up here and preach sermons about how much time and money you need to give to the Lord. All that kind of talk about amount is always proportionate, and flows from the grace of God that abounds. It is not law-binding. But we need to hear it. Your Church needs you. Your church does what it does because of your time, talent and treasure.

The master puts on the great banquet. The Feast belongs to our Lord. But without you, what kind of Feast would it be? Join the party. The Lord pours out His grace at the Feast. The Lord provides the life you have in this Feast. In His word, at His table, we receive what God places upon our lives. He places the food of grace and forgiveness. There is no better place to be. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.