

J.j.

A Feast On This Mountain

Homily for All Saints Sunday, B — 4.Nov., A.D. 2018

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Broadway and 59th Street, Sacramento, CA ☩

Isaiah 25:6-9 **6 On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.**

7 And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations.

8 He will swallow up death forever.

Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.

9 It will be said on that day,

“Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the LORD; for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.” (ESV)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

On this mountain, a feast! What mountain? Where is that mountain? I don't mind a feast now and then—like Oktoberfest! “Rich food!” “Well-aged wines!”

But the prophet speaks in the future tense: “...the LORD of hosts will make...”

That time is still to come—which is a clue to this part of Isaiah's prophecy.

It's called “The Isaiah Apocalypse,” a look into the future [*that's what “apocalypse” means: a revelation, uncovering the future*] where the prophet reveals what is coming.

What **does** he reveal? I'd like a peek into the future, e.g. election day, this Tues. Are we going to change the Congress or the Senate? People say yes—others, no! However,

Part I, We're Not Ready for Feasting

Because, Point 1, We Live Under a Shroud.

This is All Saints' Sunday; we remember and name the faithful departed.

This day is a sobering reminder that the problem with our sin is not just a matter of our morality but our mortality—all people die.

But Isaiah promises:

7 And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud...the sheet...that is cast over all peoples.”

One way to understand that word “shroud”—today we'd say “body-bag”—is to recognize our fear of death.

Ernest Becker wrote a whole book about all the ways we are in denial of death.

But the ways we try to put off that last day only prove our fear of the shroud.

It doesn't matter if we have been good or bad, saintly or ‘sinnerly,’ rich or poor.

Insurance actuarial tables say the probability that we will die is 100%.

But Isaiah might be saying that the ‘shroud’ is a veil of ignorance, a ‘sheet’ that covers the future.

In that case it means that we can't, or won't, see the meaning of holy history.

The ELCA's presiding bishop, Bishop Eaton, recently wrote that we are “a meaning-making people,” and we use two things to make meaning—**intelligence and emotions**.

If we can't make sense of God's purpose for the world and for our lives, the good bishop suggests, we are not using our smarts and feelings to learn God's message for us in Holy Scripture.

However, the mystery of history will end—all will be revealed—and we will know, in that great future apocalypse, how perfectly God has handled history.

What a great reason for feasting that will be.

Even though we live under a shroud, another reason we're not ready for feasting is—

Point 2, There Are Tears and Disgraces.

The prophet writes: “**Then the Lord God will wipe away the *tears* from all faces, and the *disgrace* of his people he will take away from all the earth,....**”

Why tears? Our loved ones leave us and it hurts; it leaves us empty with a lump in our throat.

Even years after someone dies, our eyes might get misty and our throats choke up as we remember the "faithful departed", e.g., on All Saints' Sunday.

But the prophet Isaiah says there's more to death than tears and sadness.

There is “**... the disgrace of his people...**” which means culpability, guilt, and shame before God, our Judge.

For example, Isaiah constantly warned Israel about being a bit too smug about their worship on Mt. Zion—many were just going through the motions.

And we? If we do not accept God's grace by depending only on the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, then we will be dis-graced, i.e., without God's grace.

Have you ever been disgraced? A family disgrace? A business disgrace?

Not long ago in our Placerville paper, there was a story on the front page about a couple coming home, seeing a strange car parked in front of their house, and two young women running out their front door carrying their stolen goods. The owner had a rifle in his car and shot out a back tire of the “getaway car” which made it easy for the police to find the thieves a little while later.

Now, there are the pictures of the two ladies, names and all, right there in the paper!

What a disgrace to them and their families!

But, Point 3, Being Dis-graced by God--That's Quite Another Story.

What could bring such a disgrace upon us? a loss of grace?

Even the most faithful among us have our moments of weakness and lack of faith.

We neglect our prayers; we let our minds wander during worship; we don't know our Bibles when someone challenges us or when we are filled with doubt.

Do you remember back when it came out that even Mother Theresa had her doubts, her questions and disbeliefs?

She was not perfect--none of us are.

Isaiah, in his first 39 chapters, insists that God counts us all guilty of death.

And so death is not just the natural and final stage of life, the way some soothing, but secular, counselors might like to put it--death is God's judgment on our sin.

So we're not ready for feasting, 1. because of the fear of death; 2. because of the shroud of ignorance of God's plan, and 3. because we are a disgrace to the family of God in our neglect of God's Word and Will.

Nevertheless, Part II: God Himself Readies Us for the Feast

First: God Readies Us by Taking Care of Death Once and For All.

From Isaiah's Apocalypse: “**8b...the LORD has spoken... 8a He will swallow up death forever.**”

And another apocalypse from our second lesson today: “**Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.... 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more,...**” That's from the Revelation to John, the Beloved Apostle.

And here in our Gospel today, written by the same Apostle John, we have a prayer of our Lord Jesus,

“**Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.**”

And now, His prayer ended, we have **an apocalypse of power:**

43b he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." 44 The man who had died came out,... A man dead four days—a stench already—brought back to life!

From these words of Holy Scripture we must not doubt that God has defeated death once and for all!

Second, Our Sins, Though Many, Are Forgiven

When the prophet writes about his call to be a prophet, he tells how he "...saw the

Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; ... 2 Above him stood the seraphim. ... 3 And one called to another and said:

'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!'

4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 And I said: 'Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips,....'

6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.'" (ch. 6)

Isaiah confessed that he was lost--and his guilt, his disgrace, was taken away, "atoned for."

In fact, this is a foreshadowing of the atonement by our Savior on a Roman cross.

As we are gathered here this hour, trusting our Savior Christ's death is for us, our sins are forgiven.

So, now, Third: We Are Ready for The Feast of Salvation.

We who believe the story of Jesus, we who trust and know that this is the true story of our salvation from death--we must act upon our faith.

We must with confidence live the words of our Psalm today:

"Who can ascend the hill of the LORD and who can stand in his holy place?"

"Those who have clean hands and a pure heart,
who have not pledged themselves to falsehood,
nor sworn by what is a fraud.

They shall receive a blessing from the LORD
and a just reward from the God of their salvation."

Who can go up that "hill of the LORD," to that "holy place?"

We can--it is here at this Altar.

Here we have on this mountain a "foretaste of the feast to come."

Here we eat & drink with the God Who made His covenant with Abraham, the same God Who kept His covenant by sending us His Son, Jesus.

Here the new song of the prophet Isaiah comes true: "Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

But many have not waited—whom can we invite to the grand feast?

Death still happens—we know someone in fear of death—and the main course of rich food and well-aged wines (when death is swallowed up forever) is still waiting to be served to them in God's good time.

Nevertheless, today He serves us a foretaste in this Holy Communion.

So come! Here is a feast for us and for all people - - - today - - - - on this mountain.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.