

Sunday, October 11, 2020 - 19th Sunday after Pentecost

Introduction

In Isaiah we are given a vision of the great feast to come, when God will wipe away death forever. In Jesus' parable about a great banquet, those invited do not come, so the invitation is extended to others. In our liturgy God spreads a table before us. Even amid anxiety and hardship we rejoice in the peace of God which surpasses all understanding. With great joy we feast at the table of the Lord, and we go forth to share the wonderful invitation with others hungering and thirsting for the abundant life of God.

Confession and Forgiveness

Most merciful God, we confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for his sake God forgives us all our sins. As a called and ordained minister of the church of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Prayer of the Day

Lord of the feast, you have prepared a table before all peoples and poured out your life with abundance. Call us again to your banquet. Strengthen us by what is honorable, just, and pure, and transform us into a people of righteousness and peace, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Isaiah 25:1-9

After a hymn of praise acknowledging God as a shelter for the poor, the prophet portrays a wonderful victory banquet at which death—which in ancient Canaan was depicted as a monster swallowing up everyone—will be swallowed up forever. The prophet urges celebration of this victory of salvation.

¹O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you, I will praise your name; for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure.

²For you have made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin; the palace of aliens is a city no more, it will never be rebuilt.

³Therefore strong peoples will glorify you; cities of ruthless nations will fear you.

⁴For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat. When the blast of the ruthless was like a winter rainstorm,

⁵the noise of aliens like heat in a dry place, you subdued the heat with the shade of clouds; the song of the ruthless was stilled.

⁶On 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.

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

⁸he 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.

⁹It 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.

Psalm 23

¹The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.

²The LORD makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters.

³You restore my soul, O LORD, and guide me along right pathways for your name's sake.

⁴Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is running over.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Philippians 4:1-9

Though writing from prison and facing an uncertain future, Paul calls on the Philippians to rejoice and give thanks to God no matter what the circumstance. God's peace is with us and binds together our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ, especially when things around us do not seem peaceful.

¹My brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

²I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus tells a parable indicating that the blessings of God's kingdom are available to all, but the invitation is not to be taken lightly.

¹Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ²“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ ⁵But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ ¹⁰Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding

robe, ¹²and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Message

When do we enter the kingdom of heaven as we pray in the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven”? Does the kingdom of Heaven begin here on earth and are we in it? Some will say, “Of course, I’m was baptized and confirmed and I am a member of the church.” Let’s see what Jesus says about this.

In Jesus’ parable people are invited into the kingdom of heaven, or in the story, a wedding feast for the king’s son. Some refuse to come because they have important things to do and others kill the messengers.

The writer Matthew, who believes in the golden rule, kills those who kill his messengers. Then the king invites others but the king doesn’t give up. This parable is a metaphor for the Christian mission to invite everyone to the wedding banquet to celebrate new life no matter their response.

The first group to be invited were the people of Israel and the second group were the gentles, good and bad. This represents the early Christian church that was first made up of the Jews of Israel and gentiles. The king goes into the banquet see his guest and what does he find? He finds one not properly dressed for a wedding banquet. You might be thinking that maybe he could not afford proper clothes? Ah, here is where you have to use your imagination a little, or even a lot. This whole wedding banquet is a metaphor. So, let’s think about weddings.

What happens when two people get married? They become one or at least that is what is supposed to happen. I believe that there are a lot of people who are legally married, but never really got married. They never become one. When we get married, we must be willing to change, to become one with the other person. To be married is to be engaged in each other’s lives and be willing to compromise and change one’s life for the welfare of the other.

In this parable, we are invited to become one with Jesus, the king’s son. We are asked to take what Jesus is into ourselves, to make Jesus’ teachings our own, to become one with Jesus and to engage our lives with his. It doesn’t always happen in marriage and it didn’t happen for one person in our story. One guest wasn’t wearing the proper wedding garment, but this story is not about clothes. The wedding garment represents one’s commitment to Jesus. This guest accepted the invitation to the banquet but he did not commit to the event. The king wants people to celebrate a new life together. Just being at the banquet is not what it is about. Or, just being baptized and a member of a church is not enough to give us life, joy, and celebration.

In the parable, the people of Israel believed that because they were the children of Abraham that they were already one with God. They believed that they were the children of God by their ancestry. Or in today’s setting, just being a member of a church doesn’t mean that we have become one with Jesus. Just because we have a wedding license doesn’t mean that are truly married. Just because we are baptized doesn’t mean that we are Christians.

In the story, Matthew gets rather confrontational. He says about the guest not properly attired, “Bind him and through him out into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Have you ever been in a relationship where one is not really committed to the other? Where doubt and despair keep you awake at night? Just to be married, or just to be baptized, or just to say you belong to a church isn’t enough. As a pastor I can marry many people and sign the license but that does not mean the couple have become one. As a pastor I can invite many people to our church, but those who come have to be willing to become one with Jesus to enjoy the gathering. If we do not, we are only crashing the party. We can eat all the good food and dance all night long, but what the invitation calls us to do is celebrate with the host. Jesus wants us to celebrate life with him.

One wedding that I went to was a grand banquet. The food was great and the music was excellent and I was dressed for the occasion but it was celebrating with the hosts that made it fun. The hosts went out of their way to make us feel welcome and we ate and we drank and we danced till the music stopped, but it was being involved with the host family and celebrating their joy that made it fun. This is how I understand this text. To enter the kingdom of heaven is to accept the invitation and become one with Jesus and celebrate life with God. We are invited to join the wedding feast with Jesus. We are invited to enter into the kingdom of heaven, to become one with Jesus and to celebrate with Christ the marriage feast that has no end.

Prayers of Intercession

With confidence in God's grace and mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Gracious host, fill your church with a spirit of joyous hospitality. We pray for bishops, teachers, church leaders, and all children of God as they invite others to your table of boundless grace. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Gracious host, as you set a table in the presence of enemies, so bless the efforts of diplomats, international peace workers, and world leaders who navigate conflict. May they proceed with dialogue and understanding, so that justice and peace prevails. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Gracious host, let your gentleness be known among those who are weary or ill. Strengthen doctors, medical care workers, and caretakers who see to their needs. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Gracious host, during this time of pandemic we ask for you Holy Spirit to comfort those who have loved ones in care facilities and are unable to visit in person. We ask for your hand in guiding researchers to find a vaccine. We pray for front line workers for their safety and their commitment to care for others. We pray for our families and church community as we patiently wait to come together again. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Gracious host we for Sydney Alice Mixdorf as she is baptized in your name. And we pray for her parents and sponsors and all who will guild her in her faith journey in life. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Gracious host, as we remember those who have died and are gathered at the heavenly banquet, comfort us with your presence. Assure us of your peace at all times. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Listen as we call on you, O God, and enfold in your loving arms all for whom we pray, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Offering Prayer

Blessed are you, O God, maker of all things. You have set before us these gifts of your good creation. Prepare us for your heavenly banquet, nourish us with this rich food and drink, and send us forth to set tables in the midst of a suffering world, through the bread of life, Jesus Christ, our Savior and **Lord. Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy.

The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace. Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Serve the Lord. Thanks be to God.