**October 18, 2020 World Food Sunday – Come To The Banquet**

**Based on Matthew 22:1-14**

 “I too bizzie,” said my granddaughter. She was sitting at the small table we have for her in our living room. She was so engrossed in colouring she had no time for her Dad’s question. I can’t remember what her Dad had asked her, but he recognized her focus and asked her something just so we could witness her response. It was of course hilarious. I think if she was asked if she wanted an ice cream cone or a cookie at that moment, she still would have responded, “No, I too bizzie.” She was just so distracted and preoccupied.

Life is like that isn’t it. We can all get so distracted, so focussed on a task that we sometimes miss out on something special. Unfortunately, if we get engrossed in what we think is important, we might sacrifice an obligation or a responsibility. I know that I have done that over the years, spending too much time on what I thought was a priority, later hearing disappointment from the kids or from Lenore about time spent away from them. Looking back, it was similar to this morning’s gospel reading, I was offered a banquet but missed the opportunity.

Those originally invited to the banquet with the King in today’s gospel missed an excellent opportunity as well. On the surface, it seems as if this might have been an opportunity for a fabulous meal, a notable feast with every comfort and delicacy one could imagine. Rather than taking part in such a banquet however, the invited guests, presumably the crème de le crème of society, decide they have other priorities.

One can imagine the King being outraged, how dare they! His wrath is understandable. Who would dare to refuse a royal invitation! When the King says jump, generally folks then responded with, “How High.”

**Pause**

Matthew’s gospel today contains a lot of symbolism. When we peel away the layers, a few very interesting elements come to light. The King in this passage is likely a metaphor for God. The son, whose wedding is being planned a metaphor for Jesus. Those that refused to attend the wedding are the Hebrew people who shunned and betrayed Jesus, who refused the offer of a new kin-dom, those that stayed within the political regime of the day. They were the status quo, the nonbelievers in a new time where Jesus preached justice and equality.

Angry, the King sends in the troops and destroys the city, a reference to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE.

What of the stranger, the guest not wearing a wedding robe? Some oversight perhaps? But nothing is said, the man is speechless. And so, he is tossed out on his ear, and we hear as we have done in other gospel accounts, “there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.” That is not a great outcome for the unrobed guest.

This is yet more symbolism, the unrobed one is not engaged in the banquet of grace. Perhaps he is there for his own self-interest, simply for the offer of a great meal with no strings attached. We might find this individual among us, willingly taking part in a free dinner at the church hall, but unwilling to help wash the dishes.

The parable ends with Jesus saying, “For many are called, but few are chosen.” That seems a fitting conclusion given the scenario, the first invitees refused invitations. A guest comes only for a free meal. None are deemed worthy.

In fact, I believe we are all called and we are all worthy. It is not an individual’s value but their choice that makes the difference. We are all called, called by God to engage with our families, neighbours, and communities in covenant relationships. We are called into relationships which hold up the fallen and support the needy. We are all called to advocate for peace and justice.

Unfortunately, we are not capable of the doing when we wander too far off the path. That happens when we get too busy, preoccupied, or are distracted, distracted from our covenant relationship with God and with our brothers and sisters.

Today as we celebrate World Food Sunday I wonder what the hungry of the world would do if we were just too busy? If we were too preoccupied with everything else, how would the local food bank survive? What about those local families that receive much needed food supplies over the weekend through the Star Fish program. We help to fund both those organizations through our church outreach ministry. And we support world hunger relief through donations to our Mission and Service Fund. We accept invitations to participate and help in the same way the King expected acceptance of his wedding invitation. That is the same invitation God gives us to participate in a Holy Banquet for those that need it most.

If we refused the invitation to the banquet, would there be the same response to racial unrest? Would the Black Lives Matter movement exist? Would women demanding that their politicians recognize gender equality be heard? Would there be recognition of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Two Spirited and other “Seekers,” in this country and would those children of God have a voice?

If you chose not to go to the banquet you wouldn’t exercise your vote come election day, you wouldn’t volunteer for Rotary or the Lion’s club. If you chose not to come to the banquet you would not participate as volunteers for the Kidney Foundation or Heart and Stroke Fund. The list could go on…

There are a lot of “what ifs” for God’s Kingdom reality if we don’t come to the banquet, if we succumb to being caught up in the tread mill, in the business of distraction. A lot of incredible and needed pastoral work would go undone.

But there is another profound thing about attending the banquet, and it is a gift. We ourselves are fed, clothed and embraced in God’s love when we do that.

Friday and Saturday I participated in our BC Regional Annual meeting, a meeting that has been delayed due to the pandemic. We talked and sang over zoom. We passed business motions upholding the United Church’s positions on justice and equal rights for Children in Palestine and gender equality. And we were privileged to listen to an outstanding speaker on adapting to change in our churches.

All of this was good “busy” work but our president Blair Odney kept reminding us why we were there, to do the work of God’s people in Christian ministry. We were all thanked for our flexibility and patience in staying on **zoom for one and a half days**. Many blessings were offered. But Blair hit a home run when, with incredible grace and sincere passion he said, “You are My Beloved.” The Creator, Holy Spirit and Holy Love was speaking through him as he offered that. There were almost 200 of us on the zoom call at the time and I am sure it resonated and filled us all with an incredible light as we concluded our sessions. You are My Beloved, is the grace we receive when we attend the banquet.

No matter who you are, where you are, where you are going or where you have been. Practicing Christian, Atheist, Muslim, Jew, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, or Sikh, or other, “you are beloved.”

How does it feel to know that?

Welcome to the Banquet!

Thanks for listening this morning, Amen