

Sermon for the Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost October 11, 2026 jj
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✠ sdg ✠

Eat to live, or live to eat? The Almighty God, the Lord of heaven and earth, created food right from the beginning of time to enjoy, to look at and be pleased with it, to taste and see that He is good. Salvation is a feast, as we heard Isaiah sing about in our Old Testament reading, and soon we will join in the hymn with which the six-winged angels, along with the whole company of heaven, announce with royal fanfare the arrival of the Master of the feast. He is not only the table's host, He is the Lord of hosts, and your free gift of everlasting life is fully prepared, like a wedding feast.

There is rich food in abundance, the cup of well-aged wine overflows. Nothing will be left out. It is truly going to be perfect. It is set on scenic Mount Zion, which is a favorite Old Testament symbol for the dwelling of God together in communion with men, and it is a fitting description that prophets like Isaiah have of the Christian Church, which for them was still to come. This banquet is not an empty symbol, it doesn't merely stand for some future, heavenly happiness, but it also describes the gift you have standing before you this day in the worship service. The privilege to eat this royal meal is one that our brother in Christ Peerce knew, and week after week he was here in the Lord's house, the royal banquet hall, to partake of this supper with you, his fellow honored guests. Peerce knew the power of food, that it was a privilege during his life's vocation to create tasty dishes and to serve them, whether that was to a famous line-up of Baltimore football players in his restaurant, or for a small church social dinner right here in the room next to us.

The Bible teaches us that God's gift of food includes the gift of access to Him. Adam and Eve worshiped the Lord and communed with Him by eating the fruit of the Tree of Life, as well as by avoiding to eat of the Tree of Knowledge. God reinforced His covenant with Abraham over a meal Sarah had helped him prepare for the three messengers. Moses brought 70 elders up to Mount Sinai, this time not to a reignited burning bush, but to a banquet where the men dined with God, yes, they were eating and drinking with Him. This same high honor has now been extended to you, whether your family lineage makes you part of God's original people, or you identify with the second group of guests in Jesus' parable, the people gathered in from all the highways in order to fill the wedding hall. A pure, clean garment of forgiveness has been wrapped around you, symbolized by the robe I wear every Sunday as I conduct the service and serve this meal both of Words and food. Your access to the Lord has been assured, secured as it already is by the death of Jesus on the cross, and His resurrection on the third day. He is the food that is for you the antidote to death, the payment for your sin under which you fell under death's curse. Whether you were good or bad, slave or free, rich or poor, Jew or Gentile, in-crowd or outsider, the same salvation feast is yours, the same access to God's forever grace is guaranteed. Your baptism let you in the door; you can even dip your finger in the baptismal font here at our church entrance and think of the clean garment of purity that was just put on you as you entered the Lord's holy presence today.

That would have been all well and good if Jesus could have left it there. Free meal for you, He picks up the check, everyone lives in harmony with each other because we've all been invited to the same feast together. Can't all who claim to follow Christ just get along with each other? But Jesus doesn't leave it there. He says at the end, Many are called, but few are chosen. Some rejected the royal invitation to the wedding feast. Others came, but then refused their wedding garments that signified they belonged in the hall. People rejoice for a while in the blessings of totally free forgiveness, life, and salvation, then they turn an about-face and throw it all away. It especially cuts and hurts deep when you know you need to reconcile with someone so that you can partake of God's salvation feast together once again, but for now, it's not looking like that will happen. Only selfish pride, whether it's yours, theirs, or most likely a mixture of both, can look at the marvelous feast that Jesus yearns to serve you and say, no, I've got something better in mind. Or, you can't stand the humility that it takes to deny yourself, to rely totally on God's grace and instead you insist on something you can do to earn it or pay for it. Both of those paths are going to the same place, namely, weeping and gnashing of teeth.

But do not fear! The master of the feast is merciful. He wants you to partake of life everlasting, the best of foods, the finest of wines. He wants you in His royal wedding banquet hall. He wants you clothed in a purity that you did not have within you, but it is a purity that He gave you straight from the cross of Jesus. Only with His Holy Spirit's help will you successfully battle the constant temptation to throw this all away. You remain a sinner, and sinners reject the Lord and insist on their own way. They

want to be independent from God; a sinner often falls for the alluring, but empty promises of the devil. You, however, have been called, and chosen. By grace you are a saint—more on that is coming in a few weeks. You remain your Lord's honored guest to His feast. You are reconciled to Him, access is regained through His meal, and He can provide the breakthrough to the reconciliation that you may be hungering for right now. Through His Word of forgiveness and encouragement He offers to strengthen you through your temptations and take away your sin, clothing you over and over again in the perfect wedding garment that you inherited when you were baptized.

That baptismal wedding garment is still available to you. Repent of your sin, including your worries and concerns. Lay all at His feet. Go ahead, spread all your trophies, all you hold dear, sacred, even whatever you fear the most. It's not yours. It's His. Believe that as the called and ordained servant of the Word speaks it, you have actually received full forgiveness; then extend that forgiveness within the context of your particular vocation, and forgive those who sin against you with the same Divine power that God gives to the pastor in his vocation. Believe that the heavenly banquet is here laid before you on the Altar, only for now it is hidden under bread and wine that truly is the Body and Blood of Christ, just as He says. Eat to live, and live now in a new way ready to eat the salvation feast that was meant for you. You are worthy of this feast because Christ Your Savior bestowed His perfect worthiness upon You by faith. Be assured, just as Peerce was assured, that God's food is powerful, it brings you close to Him and in Him, closer to one another. It's a food of forgiveness, a food of assurance that He has bound Himself in the

wedding bond of faith to you forever, and that your body, though it even may get reduced to ashes and dust, that body of yours will one day behold the Lord in full glory, and sit at table with Him in a glorious resurrected body in the life of the world to come.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.