

06/21/20

2nd Sunday after Holy Trinity

Come, for all things are now ready

Luke 14: 15-24

Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, “Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!”

Then He said to him, “A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, “Come, for all things are now ready.”

But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.’

And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’

Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’

So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.

And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’

Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.

For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.’”

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

The central chapters of St. Luke’s Gospel are given to presenting a number of parables which Jesus of Nazareth—as the Master-Teacher—used in His preaching and His instruction. St. Mark informs us that the loving purpose for which Jesus used these homey illustrations and stories from everyday life was to make the mysteries of the Kingdom of God at least somewhat accessible to all His hearers. Working-men and women, housewives and husbands, fishermen and merchants—those who listened to the Prophet from Galilee were not, for the most part, learned theologians or philosophers. Yet they were familiar with shepherds and their flocks, and they knew about trying to save money. They could grasp something about their Creator-and-Savior God when Jesus compared Him to a shepherd who goes to look for his one lost sheep or to a woman who searches through her

whole house to find the one precious coin that she had misplaced. They could know something about the faith-creating power of the Gospel when Jesus compared it to a tiny seed that grows into a mighty tree. A father's forgiving love for his prodigal son who squanders his inheritance but returns in heartfelt remorse—that was a picture of repentance and of the forgiving love of Israel's God to which they could relate. Through such pictures and illustrations from everyday life, Jesus gave them at least some understanding of the mysteries of the Kingdom and the redeeming love of God.

In the parable of the great supper which is our text, the Great Teacher shows His love both for the Pharisees who were rejecting Him and for us—“the maimed and the lame and the blind,” the surprising guests like us who have been found out on “the highways and hedges.” We learn that we must not take for granted our Lord's invitation, and we also learn how His grace and His love extends even to the likes of you and me.

I

It is to the self-righteous Pharisees who were there at the dinner which our Savior was attending that Jesus directs His story. They had already put their pride on display by seeking for themselves the places of honor at the table. Now one of them responds to Jesus' teaching with the banal platitude, “Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!” That comment indicates to Jesus the man's smug assurance that he himself deserved to be included in that “eat(ing of) bread in the kingdom of God.” And so Jesus tells His story of this feast which the invited guests choose to skip and which is attended instead by the most unexpected guests.

In Jesus' story, the servant is sent out to tell those who had been invited, “Come, for all things are now ready.” Such a supper as the one to which they were invited was a matter of great effort and expense for the host—making his home ready, buying the special foods to be served to his guests, preparing the meal itself. But the invited guests now make lame excuses. Inspecting a recently-purchased field, seeing to a new yoke of oxen, a new spouse—all of these were simply matters of everyday life and were not at all adequate reasons for snubbing the host's invitation. Instead, their excuses were crassly insulting, and the host is, finally, fully justified in his verdict, “(N)one of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.”

Our Savior's meaning here is plain. The Lord's invitation had been sent to the Pharisees and religious leaders of the people. His Anointed One had come to atone also for their sin and to win new life also for them. But by their prideful religion of self-trust—their self-satisfied certainty that they deserved to be included in God's Kingdom—they were snubbing the Lord's offer, just like the invited guests in Jesus' parable. The Son of God had

come to win for them forgiveness and an eternity in heaven, but their haughty self-righteousness was an insulting rejection of His grace and love.

II

Like the great supper in Jesus' story, the great feast of our Lord's grace and mercy to which Christ Jesus invited these Pharisees and to which He invites us is also a matter of great effort and enormous expense. At the very time that Jesus told this story, He was already on His way for the last time to the holy city of Jerusalem. In order to invite us to receive His forgiveness, He would there pay that high price which we can scarcely imagine—which we can only contemplate in wonder at the foot of His cross on the hill Golgotha. The betrayal, the scourging, the crown of thorns, the nails in His hands and feet—these are the parts of the enormous cost of His banquet which we can see. But we must also hear Him cry in agony to His Father in heaven. We must also grasp this truth, that He has taken our sins as His own and carried them in His own, spotless conscience. He has also born the Father's condemnation against our fallenness. In His redeeming love, He has willingly paid that cost in order to win forgiveness for us.

He invites us to receive also the life which He wants us to have—new life with Him here and eternal life with Him in heaven—and for that, too, He has paid an enormous price. To die the death we have deserved, to give up His own life for our benefit, to enter the grave in our stead—that is the cost of the new life He offers. And yet, in His saving love for us, He has willingly paid also that ultimate cost in order to invite us to His feast of life.

Now He says to us, "Come, for all things are ready."

III

In order to profit fully from our Lord's parable, we need to see ourselves as the surprising guests whom the host receives at his banquet. Because the invited guests have spurned his invitation, he tells his servants to go out to all the hidden lanes and alleys in the city and "bring in...the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind." And when there is still room at his table, he bids his servants to go "out into the highways and hedges"—to bring in the vagabonds and the homeless and the social outcasts, those with no resources, the ceremonially unclean. These would be grateful to the host for his hospitality. These would understand that it was not their deserving or their own goodness which gave them a place at his table.

It is a consistent and oft-repeated theme in Luke's Gospel that the Kingdom of God is compared to a great banquet at which we share fellowship with our God. In Jesus' day, the matter of table-fellowship was taken with great seriousness—it involved the closest relationship of friendship and trust and mutual love.

The Kingdom of God is such a shared meal, Jesus teaches us. Heaven itself is compared to a great wedding feast, and, as a preview of that blessed, heavenly banquet, our fellowship with our incarnate Lord is sealed and confirmed at His altar, when we share in the mystery of His supper—the body He gave for us and the blood He shed with us—by faith made one with Him in this most intimate way. “Come, for all things are now ready,” He says to the likes of you and me who have no claim on His mercy and grace, who are the unexpected and surprising guests at the feast of His love.

Our Savior’s parable calls us to accept His invitation with humble gratitude, to take every opportunity to dine at His table by hearing His word and receiving His sacramental meal, and to work now as His servants who invite others to join us at His table. That is the response of those who understand that it is the Lord’s grace—His completely undeserved love for the sake of Christ Jesus—which leads Him to invite us. That is the only proper response for surprising guests at His banquet like you and me.

May the Holy Spirit help us to respond to our Lord’s invitation in this way, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.