

The Second Sunday after Trinity, A²D 2008

Luke 14:15-24 When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" ¹⁶ But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. ¹⁷ And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' ¹⁸ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.' ¹⁹ And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' ²⁰ And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' ²¹ So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' ²² And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' ²³ And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. ²⁴ For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'"

In the Name of the Father and of the ² Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 What's your excuse? One had just purchased a field and wanted to go see his purchase. Fair enough. A newly purchased field needs attention. Had he attended the banquet instead of seeing his field, what would have become of his field? Another had just purchased some oxen and wanted to give them a thorough examination. Also fair. He surely wanted to make sure the newly acquired oxen were taken care of. If he neglected the oxen to go to a banquet, he might have lost some of them. The third had just married, so he wanted some time with his new wife. Fair. A banquet would have spoiled the joy of the honeymoon.

2 Poor Pharisees. They don't get a lot of positive attention in the accounts of the Gospel. Jesus delivered this discussion of banquet etiquette while dining in the home of a ruler of the Pharisees on the Sabbath. First he rebuked the guests for trying to seat themselves in places of undeserved honor and for refusing to humble themselves. Then He turned his attention to the host of the dinner, saying, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you." And then this parable in the periscope for today. Jesus warned the Pharisees that they are rejecting the Lord's invitation to the eternal banquet.

3 Their excuses were certainly valid. When Jesus called two men earlier in Luke's Gospel, they had valid excuses, too. One answered, "Yes, but let me go bury my father." The other said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus rebuked both men for their excuses: "Let the dead bury their own dead," and "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

What about you? What's your excuse?

4 Ah, yes, Lord, I plan to have family devotions, but I'm just short on time right now. I will begin a routine of daily prayer and Scripture reading just as soon as I take care of some of these pressing projects. I'll come to where your Word is preached as long as there's not a game on Sunday mornings. I'll come hear your word of Absolution spoken to me just as soon as I've got some noteworthy sins and a Wednesday evening free from meetings. I'll come receive your Holy Supper as long as it's not hunting season, vacation season, shopping season, busy season or summertime. Are they valid excuses? Sometimes, maybe. But Jesus is clear: an excuse, however noble, however valid, is still just an excuse.

5 Maybe you like the Pharisees misunderstand the banquet. The Lord doesn't need you in worship weekly so He can feel good about Himself. He's not so in need of affirmation that, if He doesn't hear your praise on Sunday morning, He'll be depressed for the next six days. He doesn't give you prayer and invite you to use it because He's lonely and needs someone to talk to. He hasn't given you His sacred Scriptures so that you will begrudgingly read them as if you were studying for some final exam. He hasn't given you His Holy Supper so that you will feel obligated to receive it. He doesn't call men to speak words of absolution to you so they can have knowledge of your secret sins. He doesn't gather His people together, doesn't call them into His eternal banquet, because He wants a lot of friends. Repent of misunderstanding these gifts of the Lord. Repent of seeing His gifts as burdens. Repent of making excuses for not receiving the Lord's gifts.

6 You're not invited to the banquet because you're a great guy or girl. Quite the opposite. Jesus followed His own advice and invited to His banquet only the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame. As St. Paul says in today's Epistle reading, "now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Your sin, your innate tendency to reject the Lord's gifts, made you "far off," alienated from God. But the Lord didn't leave you far off. God came to you, came to dwell with His creation. From the Virgin's womb to Calvary's Cross, the blood of Jesus flowed for you. His life was lived to reconcile you to God, and His death was the payment for your sinfulness. His blood has paid for your sin. For His sake, you have been invited to the banquet. For His sake, you have been compelled to come in. For His sake, you have been brought in.

7 God has changed your sinful living and your sinful thinking. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. This wisdom has been delivered to you as faith. In the waters of Holy Baptism, you were given new life. The sinful flesh was put to death, and you were set free from your bondage to sin. No longer are you

bound to ask sinful questions like “How much must I go to church, or receive the Sacrament, or be absolved, or pray, or read my Bible to be a Christian?” You have been released from that foolish thinking. Instead, Wisdom says to you, “Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways and live, and walk in the way of insight.” Faith simply doesn’t say “no.” Faith is not concerned with excuses. Faith is the “yes,” the “Amen,” to God’s gifts.

8 This banquet, these gifts from the Lord, are only a foretaste of what is to come. These gifts teach you to love the Giver, the Lord. They prepare you to spend your endless days in His presence, in the fullness of the Master’s house, in the banquet which has no end. “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” The Lord has made you members of His household, has seated you at this royal banquet by faith in Jesus.

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

Soli Deo Gloria

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