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## The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost October 15, 2023

### Summons and Respect

In love God invites all people to come to his banquet of grace and receive the blessing of life that lasts forever. No matter what our past, good or bad, God calls us to be his guests. What a tragedy it is—and how troublesome it is to God—that so many ignore, refuse, or insult his invitation. Jesus' parable of the wedding banquet reminds us of his gracious *summons* and urges us to *respect* his invitation with solemn and eager joy.

### Sermon Isaiah 25:6-8

**<sup>6</sup>On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. <sup>7</sup>On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; <sup>8</sup>he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.**

Introduction: I always enjoyed teaching at the seminary, but if they invited me to come back and teach again, I don't think I would. I don't need to correct student sermons anymore! Now if they said I wouldn't have to correct sermons, just come back and teach, I might do that. I've been a Green Bay Packer fan as long as I can remember and I've gone to plenty of games, but if somebody invited me to a game this season, I don't think I would go—too much walking and too cold. Now if the seats turned out to be in a luxury box, and somebody dropped me off at the Lambeau Field entrance, I would probably go. Brenda and I have visited London twice in our lives and I absolutely love that city. If Mark Hilgendorf invited me to go to London one last time, I would definitely say no. Visiting London takes a lot of money—it's the most expensive city to visit in the world—and at this point in my life I should be saving my money. Now if Mark said that Trinity and St. John's were picking up the tab—all expenses paid—I would start packing my suitcase tomorrow.

That wasn't a hint or a suggestion. I thought up those three little situations because this morning we want to think about being invited to do something or go somewhere that we would really, really love. Doing it or going there would be like a dream come true. Trouble is, accepting the invitation seems absolutely impossible: Too many hurdles--too hard, too expensive, too old. But then we read in the fine print that the hurdles are gone, wiped out, vanished. Not too hard, not too expensive, we're not too old after all. All at once the dream of a lifetime isn't a dream anymore. Despite what we thought, this invitation is too good to refuse.

The Bible uses all kinds of pictures to describe what life with God is like. Life with God is like a beautiful garden or a vineyard of grapes or a city with gold sidewalks. Sometimes the Bible describes life with God as a banquet or a feast. David wrote in Psalm 23, **You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.** St. John described life with God in heaven **as the marriage supper of the Lamb.** In the First Reading for today Isaiah wrote about **a feast of rich food for all peoples** and in the Gospel Jesus tells a story about **a wedding banquet prepared for a king's son.** All these banquet pictures invite us and summon us to experience and enjoy a life which is better than anything we could ever imagine.

### This Invitation Is Too Good to Refuse

The temple in Jerusalem was the focus of Old Testament faith. The temple was where God revealed himself to his people. The services and sacrifices at the temple cemented the people's relationship with God. The temple was built on a flat hill called Mt. Zion and people often called the temple the mountain of the Lord.

In the First Reading for today the Lord let the prophet Isaiah look into the future to see that the temple on Mt. Zion and really the entire Jewish religious life was coming to an end. Everything that went on in the temple was geared to focus on the coming of Messiah. When Jesus came, the temple wasn't important anymore. The temple was a shadow; Jesus was the real thing. He warned the people that the temple would be destroyed but he didn't stop there. Isaiah described a new era and a new age which included a new Jerusalem, a new temple, a new Mt. Zion. And this is what he could see: **On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines.**

Isaiah could see that every entrée Messiah would provide in this New Testament banquet would be perfect. Nothing Jesus does for us is overcooked or underdone. There are no bugs in the flour, no slime on the meat. Jesus forgives every sin, he hears every prayer, he guides every journey, he knows every problem. There are no warning labels on Jesus' blessings and no worry about nasty side effects.

At his banquet Jesus does more than give, he also takes away. Without God, human beings are always walking around in the dark. Sometimes life is foggy and fuzzy but sometimes life is pitch-black. People move around trying to find a way to God's love, but then they bump into his demands and his anger and crash into a wall of death. Isaiah could see what the Savior would do. **On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations.** Jesus takes the fog away so we can see that he is the way to God's love. He lived in our place and died in our place and he came to life and brings us together with God. The dark wall of death is gone and the path to God is open and clear: **He will swallow up death forever,** Isaiah wrote. As long as we live here, we'll experience sad times and sick times but there, where we live with Jesus forever, **He will wipe away the tears from all faces.** There'll be nothing to weep about. With Jesus the ugliness and shame of sin is gone: **He will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth.**

What Isaiah does here is paint a little miniature picture of Jesus' work. The complete story of God's love runs from the beginning of time to the end of it. But even in this little vignette, we can see how good God's love for us is. God never asked that we correct any tests or keep any laws to gain his love. He never insisted that we endure the cold or punish our bodies to deserve it. He never demanded that we pay for the ticket and cover the cost to earn it. We couldn't have done any of that. He invited us and chose us and adopted us simply because he loves us. He worked in our hearts with the Gospel and connected us to him through faith. In the Second Reading St. Paul wrote, **For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith.** God invites us to his banquet of love in Scripture alone, by grace alone, and through faith alone. This invitation is too good to refuse!

If you can believe it, some people do refuse the invitation. We heard about them in the parable Jesus told in today's Gospel. **The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.** The king was patient; he sent out the invitation again, but they still refused to come. Who knows why. Some didn't even bother with an RSVP; **they paid no attention.** Some sent regrets but their excuses were flimsy; they had to **take care of their businesses.** It wasn't that they couldn't come; they just didn't want to come. Some were downright mean; **they killed the king's messengers.** And then there was the one guy who came to the banquet dressed in cut-off jeans and a tee shirt; he was going to do things his way and nobody was going to tell him what to wear. In the end the king destroyed them all.

Sunday after Sunday—really, day after day—Jesus issues his invitation to the banquet of life with God which is too good to refuse. He sends that invitation to us and to people around us and he sends it again and again. What

happens? Sometimes people just don't care. They may come to church once in a while, but Jesus doesn't mean much to them. He's a character from their Sunday School days and that's about it. Sometimes people have other things to do: Sunday is a good day to sleep in or take the kids to soccer practice or get over a headache or protect themselves from Covid exposure. Some don't like the idea of living as a Christian. They resent God's call to turn away from pet sins or live in love with one another or to support the work of the ministry. And then there are some who expect God to meet them on their terms. I'll come when I want to come and I'll sin when I want to sin. I expect God to do it my way and not his way. They all hear the invitation which is too good to refuse and then they refuse it. Nothing but insane rejection.

**Many are invited**, Jesus said at the end of his parable, **but few are chosen**. The invitation to the Savior's feast of forgiveness goes out to everyone, but not everyone believes what Jesus gives. Today is a good day for all of us to remember how lavish and luxurious life with God really is so that every day we hear his invitation with sober and serious respect. "The feast is ready; come to the feast. The good and the bad, come and be glad. Greatest and least, come to the feast." Amen.