

Matthew 22:1-14 The Banquet
Philippians 4:1-9
October 11, 2020

The sharing of food is becoming more and more problematic. The first reason is about the food itself. With genetic modification that has turned out to be difficult for some, issues with gluten, to allergies to yeast and various chemical used in processing, to diets limiting salt and sugar and fat, to lifestyle practices that go by names like vegetarian, vegan, piscetarian; it is a wonder any two people can get together and share a meal.

And now with the coronavirus pandemic, the problem is not with the food itself but with the sharing of it. When people get together to eat they let their guard down, lose themselves in laughter and conversation and filling their faces; spreading germs and bacteria, and viruses.

Throughout human history people have celebrated their happiest times, grieved their saddest times, and observed everyday life, around the table. Some people find their purpose in preparing the food and offering hospitality, and now we are in this situation in which it is not easy to do safely. What is not clear is the replacement for it. How can people get together over life's most important moments and life's everyday living, if food and the sharing of it are not at the center of those activities. I confess not to have the answer. What I do know is that even though the bible comes to us from people who lived in a variety of different

cultural situations with diverse traditions, they lived life around the table. They all had feasts, and understood the significance of a banquet. When Jesus tried to explain what God's economy is like, what God's Kingdom is like, upon occasion, he resorted to mealtime examples. And this is so not only in parables, lest we forget, that one of the two most important rituals in the Christian Faith is a meal.

In this case it is a parable and what a story it is. A king prepared a banquet for his son's wedding and invited all his friends who were the first people of the town. One by one they all declined and left the king with preparations for a large gathering and with no one to share it.

Matthew's telling of the parable is harsher than in the Luke. In Matthew, the invited actually kill some of the king's servants, and are treated in kind by the king's army, who then ordered his servants out into the streets and told them to invite everyone. And even then one comes without dressing properly and the epitaph at the end serves up a hard lesson, "for many are invited, but *few* are chosen."

As an aside, I must draw attention to the context, both in which Jesus told this parable, and in which the church found itself when the gospels were written. That context involved a conflict between Jesus, his followers on one side, and on the other, the religious and political leaders among the Jewish people. These parables were *about* that conflict. And the leaders knew it. At the end of the 21st chapter we find these

words, “when the chief priests and the pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them.”

There is really no way around it, in our context, we can only conclude that he is talking about us. I say this tenderly. Let us not be like the invited guests who refuse to come to the banquet because they have other things to do, or come wrongly without the appropriate dress and comportment.

Paul

Then there is the text from St. Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, which is a sermon unto itself, and one of my all-time favorites; not so much because it is light and joyful, just under the surface, it isn’t; or because it is easy to obey and apply to life, it is nearly impossible not to worry; but because of the positive way it sets the bar high. It makes the strongest suggestion, I believe, of what the heavenly feast is like, what the people at the feast will be like.

The people there may be like Euodia and Synteche who were apparently having a hard time getting along. But they are challenged to the complete transformation of their inner lives by the gospel. The expectation is that each of us will become less self-pre-occupied, and I am drawn back to the invitees who simply had too much else to do, than be the guests at a great feast. There were too full of themselves. Let that sink in.

So, with this image fresh in our minds, this great parabolic feast to which everyone has been invited, but some refuse to come, and some come wrongly; let us listen again to Paul’s instructions, they are nowhere better stated, and let us hear them as instructions for the guests at the banquet of God, where the real food at the feast is the spiritual nourishment of the gospel message;

That our weakness is met by God’s strength; Our sinful selfishness is met by God’s mercy; Our sickness, by God’s healing. These are not mere words but lived realities, which explain why Jesus uses rather harsh language and images to speak to those who display a faithless response. But we are not faithless, so listen to how Paul says we should order our thinking and our attitudes:

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. May God bless the hearing and the doing of God’s Word.

Matthew 22 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: 2 “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

4 “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

5 “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. 6 The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. 7 The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

8 “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come.

9 So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ 10 So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11 “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 12 He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless.

13 “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie his hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

14 “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

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