

Second Sunday after Trintiy  
St. Luke 14:15-24

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

“Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!” Prompted by this statement, made by a guest at the dinner thrown by a Pharisee whereat Jesus is also a guest, He teaches a parable about a certain man who gave a great supper and invited many. He had just taught the Pharisees all around the dinner table about table etiquette. Take the lowest available seat and be told to move up, for it is better to be told to move up than to move down. “For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (cf. Luke 14:8-11) When you are host, invite those who cannot repay you. for it is of no credit to you to invite someone you then expect to invite you back. “And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” (cf. Luke 14:12-14) Now, a master is giving a banquet, and the invitees are refusing to come.

The parable, like all the others, is meant to convey the reality of the Kingdom of God in the form of a story. The master, therefore, is the Father who gives a banquet, being, of course, the victory feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom which has no end. The servants, then, are the prophets and ministers that God sends to proclaim His message—to give His invitation.

Beyond that, there are three types of people in the parable. The first type would be the invitees. They are the many that the certain man invited to his great supper. The second type would be the people of the streets and lanes of the city who a servant brought in. When these were all gathered at the great supper, there was still room. So, then, the third type would be those from the highways and hedges from outside of the city. The people of the second and third type are similar, but they are not the same, and they are both quite different than the people of the first type.

The invitees represent the people of Israel who reject Jesus as the Messiah. Most prominent among them are the Pharisees, scribes, elders, and priests. The Pharisees were perhaps the ones with whom Jesus interacted the most—the ones who most often sought to defy Him and trap Him. Strangely enough, it was in the house of a Pharisee where Jesus was eating as today’s text happened, but He was invited to the meal in order that they might trap Him, so you can bet they were hanging on every word He said. And it was the chief priests and elders who pressed for His crucifixion, inciting the crowds against Him before Pilate. They were the ones who did everything they could to keep the Law, and more, which would be their man-made ordinances and traditions.

The people of the streets and lanes of the city are those Jews who were of lower reputation than the Pharisees, scribes, elders, and priests, and there were even outcasts among them. Compared to the first type of people, they didn’t measure up. They had a difficult time with man-made ordinances and traditions, even more so the Law of God. These are the “other men” that the Pharisee thanked God he was not like in another of Jesus’ parables. (cf. Luke 18:9-14) Things would be hopeless for this group of people except that they have heard about this Rabbi, and some even go looking for Him.

The third type of people, from outside of the city, are most certainly outcasts. Gentiles, most of them, though among their number may also be Jews who were unclean for one reason or another, most likely an illness, such as leprosy, or perhaps he was happened upon by robbers along the road, and he’s a bloody mess. The people of the first type would do all that they could to avoid these people, including going out of their way to pass them by on the other side of the road (cf. Luke 10:30-32) Even some of these had heard of Jesus, and came to Him, seeking mercy for themselves or their kin.

The invitees are such by way of their being chosen by God. These are the ones that He led out of Egypt by the hand. These are the ones that He brought out of the wilderness to their own land. These are the one through whom the Promise would be kept, and it was. These are the ones to whom God would give so much—the ones He desires to gather under His wings and care for. (cf. Luke 13:34) And

to a person, they each found a reason to reject the invitation, to refuse the care and compassion of their God.

They were better than that. And they were certainly better than the rest of the people in the city and those outside of the city. They didn't need God. Some of them might have confessed a need for God, even a belief in God—and they might even have believed their own deception—but inwardly and by their deeds, they betrayed their confession.

By what deeds? Well, where was compassion for the neighbor? Well, to them, a neighbor was only someone like them, someone with whom they could always get along. As for the rest, there was no need for compassion. In fact, there was room only for contempt and disgust.

Christian congregations are filled with people of this first type. Week after week in many places, the invitation is given to come to a great supper, and many do kneel and receive the body and blood of Christ, but some refrain, though they would otherwise be deemed worthy, because they don't feel like they need it that day. God offers His gifts—Jesus gives His own body and blood for you—and some reject it because, perhaps, they had a good week and don't feel a need for it this time or more than so many times a year is too many times or even that they feel like they have been too wicked to receive it. Like the invitees in the parable, the excuses are many.

What this means, of course, is that these many think themselves good enough (or perhaps too good) for Jesus. Like the Pharisees, they think themselves capable of keeping the Law and entering eternity by their own works and merits. Of them, Jesus said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (Luke 5:31-32) The consequence of thinking oneself not in need of the Physician is that on the last day, He will say to you, "Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you." (Matthew 25:12)

And, there are also those who display a complete lack of compassion for their fellow members. They may say that they love their neighbor as themselves, but they do anything they can, go out of their way, to avoid a fellow member at all costs—avoiding eye contact, booking it down another aisle in the store, being rude when they must interact. It may be that they hold a grudge over some past unknown or even confessed and forgiven sin. It could be that it is simply their personality and they have a hard time getting along with almost everyone. Unless you are exactly like them (or they are exactly like you), they'd simply rather not have anything to do with you, and, like the Pharisaic definition of a neighbor, they justify it with the claim that you are not their neighbor.

The thing is, if one thinks themselves better than their neighbor, than they think themselves better than their Savior. For who is their Savior but one who came to be their neighbor? They are, therefore, no different than those who would refuse the invitation. And, in fact, in the Pharisees of Jesus' time, you see both attitudes at work. These reject Jesus as their God and Savior, and reject that their neighbor is anyone with whom they would come in contact, whether they like them or identify with them or not. They think they keep the Law, but they fail to do so in every respect; further, they are completely blind to it all.

Do either of these people sound like you? Is this a condemnation of you and your life? Well then, good, the Law of God is convicting you of your sin. To reject the grace of God is a condemnation of your life. To refuse to have compassion on your fellow man is to deny the entire second table of the Law—to love your neighbor as yourself—and God's definition of neighbor (you'll hear more about that in August). In both cases, whether you think you do or not, you say little more than that you have no need for Jesus—you proclaim your own sinlessness as you regard sinlessness.

But, congregations are also filled with people of the second and third type. These, as I mentioned, are different from each other, but they do have something in common. These are brought into the great supper of the master, compelled to come, even. They are not simply invited, for the

invitation would be refused; in fact, in the culture of Jesus' time, such an invitation would have to be refused. The servant brings them in, compels them to come.

I mentioned before that the servants represent those by whom the message is relayed to the people. But when one is sent to bring in the outcasts and compel the Gentiles to come, there is something more going on than simply another man telling them to come. If it were merely up to your pastor to tell you to come, eat and drink from the Great Supper, I would wager that there would be excuses and absences from the table. Your pastor cannot bring you here, much less compel you to come.

But you are most certainly brought here and compelled to come to the table, and your pastor is a means by which this is accomplished. The "something more" going on is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is He that brings you to this place and compels you to take a place at the Great Supper, and by Him through the words spoken by your pastor, it is for you exactly that He makes it, as Jesus declares it to be. "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."

The Great Supper to which He brings you is Christ's body and blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. In it, you receive life and medicine against your old, evil nature, which seeks to make of you one of the first type of people, who finds your neighbor only in the kind of people with whom you get along. By it, the Spirit sanctifies you and keeps you with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. This is most certainly true.

Who is brought to the Great Supper, compelled to take a spot at the Table of the Lord? None else than sinners in need of Jesus' mercy and grace. Look at the parable one more time and you'll see it. The invitees thought themselves better than the rest because they thought the rest vile sinners, unlike themselves, and it is these sinners who are brought and compelled to the master's great supper. In fact, it was the Pharisees and scribes who complained, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." (Luke 15:2)

Jesus did not deny the complaint, but embraced it. Today's parable demonstrates as much; reiterating that Jesus' table fellowship is with sinners. Rev. Matthew Harrison once boldly proclaimed, "Jesus lives in the hearts of sinners, so you better be one." He dwells in your hearts, dear sinners, by bringing you to this place and compelling you to His table. And here, in this place and at this table, He sanctifies you, declares you righteous—forgives you for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.