

**20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity: October 6, 2024**  
**“The Feast Is Ready”**

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The time has finally arrived. The table is set. The decorations are up. The excitement of this celebration has reached the precipice of anticipation. You can feel the excitement and all is ready. You know exactly what that’s like. You do this quite often. The LWML, or as it is now known, Lutheran Women in Mission, has prepared and sent the invitations for this morning’s celebration of fellowship after the service. Many families and friends did the same for homecoming this past week. Weekly many gather around their grills before processing into the college stadiums waiting for kickoff to break the tension of anticipation.

What is the purpose? We can convince ourselves that it is about being entertained and filling a few hours of distraction from the week, but it really takes up more than just a few hours, doesn’t it? We spend days and countless moments in anxious preparation and planning. We send the invitations. We struggle over responses not yet returned. We fret over having enough food and drink to last for all to be satisfied. We wonder if everyone will get along and actually have a good time. We work diligently to try, as much as we are able, to predict and preserve a certain outcome, fulfilling a specific picture of expectations that we want others to experience. Rather than simply living in the moment, we try to narrow to options in order to project the path others must go down, so that success is ensured (at least as I define it). We even spend much time reflecting on what happened, both good and bad. Pondering what we can do differently for preparation the next time.

Now, this isn’t always bad. We plan because we care. We know what is good. We have tasted and seen, and we want others to share in that experience. The LWML was founded in 1942, but it’s roots in the LCMS go back a few more years. *Beginning in the 1850s, women of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod started local auxiliaries to meet the needs of people—mending clothes for seminarians, equipping hospitals, establishing schools, developing convalescent and retirement homes, assisting orphanages and residences for people with disabilities, gathering clothing, furniture and food for indigents, and funding mission endeavors at home and abroad.*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> History taken from the LWML website: [lwml.org/history](http://lwml.org/history)

In the 1950s, the excitement of the work of this mission society, which also aimed at strengthening women in their vocations as women, service for God at home, in their communities, and across the world, culminated in the Lutheran Women League Pledge, which stated, *“In fervent gratitude for the Savior's dying love and His blood-bought gift of redemption we dedicate ourselves to Him with all that we are and have; and in obedience to His call for workers in the harvest fields, we pledge Him our willing service wherever and whenever He has need of us. We consecrate to our Savior our hands to work for Him, our feet to go on His errands, our voice to sing His praises, our lips to proclaim His redeeming love, our silver and our gold to extend His Kingdom, our will to do His will, and every power of our life to the great task of bringing the lost and the erring into eternal fellowship with Him.”*

The table was set for the gifts to be given, which continues today in utilization for all people, wherever and whenever they have need. That's the goal. That's the expectation. That's the work. The time has come.

With much anticipation, we turn to the Gospel reading this morning. A king throws a wedding banquet for his son. Sounds like a great time. Not all weddings are fun for all people, but when paid for by a king?! One is surely to find something good.

Keep in mind, the invitations have already been sent. The messengers who go out, first go to those who had received the invitation quite a while ago. This is the anticipated event; greater than Lutheran Women in Mission cookies, greater than homecoming, greater than tailgating. This is the king's feast!

So, what happens? Those who are first invited make excuses not to come. The king sends more messengers, and those who are invited refuse to come. They treat the messengers shamefully and kill them. The king responds by burning their city. He destroys everything, kills everyone.

But he still wants guests. So, he sends out messengers to invite anyone they can find. There is no discrimination. The good and the bad and the ugly are invited. Any breathing body, completely without merit, is welcome. Anyone and everyone is invited. The tactic works. The hall is nearly full. But then a surprise. Someone has come who won't wear the wedding garment. This is a special garment that is given by the king. It is a gift that signifies you have been received by the king are you are his guest.

This man refuses the king's gracious generosity and will not wear the wedding garment. For this indiscretion, he is bound hand and foot and tossed into the darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Instead of eternal rejoicing in the gracious presence of the King, he is cast into eternal, solitary pain and sadness. For many are called, but few are chosen.

What do learn from this text? Many things. First, make sure you do not upset the Lutheran Woman in Mission! Seriously though, there are really two warnings we glean from this text. The first is that it is eternally harmful to reject the invitation of the King, of God Himself. The second is that when we receive the invitation, it is not by your own reason or strength, your own merit or worthiness, by your own clothing that you want to be seen. It is equally eternally destructive to reject and refuse the gracious garment of the King.

It is eternally important to recognize the invitation comes from God. It is His grace. He wants all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. He wants all to be disciples by baptism in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, being taught all things in His Word. He wants all to be washed clean and made holy in Him, to be forgiven and welcomed as honored guests. He invites everyone by the Gospel, as the good news that Jesus has died once, for all.

The second warning is chilling. One might rightly ask, "Is it not enough to be baptized? Is it not enough to be cleansed and have God's own Name upon you?" The free gift is truly awesome, which leads us then to ask, "How do you keep the grace He gives? Where do we get this garment and how do we keep it, so that we are not cast into that place of darkness with weeping and gnashing of teeth?"

Fearing Hell, or desiring an effective fund-raising technique, men have often thought that the way to hold on to grace, or to make Baptism effective, was the performance of good works. The human logic makes sense: We've come to Christ by grace, but if we stop doing good works we will lose that grace and be cast out. They conclude that good works are the wedding garment that keep us in God's favor.

Not only is that false, but is it dangerously wicked. Grace that has to be earned or kept is not grace. Consider how you speak to your children. You do not tell them that you love them as long as they behave or that you brought them into this world for free but now they must prove worthy of your love. You tell them that you love them . . . no matter what.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, ***“which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup> Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? <sup>11</sup> If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”<sup>2</sup>***

God’s love is not conditional. Good works are pleasing your Father in heaven, but they do not convince Him to love you or to keep on loving you. His love is perfect and without limit. It creates something from nothing. He causes rocks and beasts to sing His praise. He calls saints out of sinners. You can do nothing actively to accept the gift. You receive it from Him as a wonderful and precious gift. The warning is that you do have the power to reject God’s love.

The warning is that while it is possible to reject Christ out of hand, like the city that was destroyed in the parable, the more important warning for Christians is that His grace can be rejected. It is possible to come to the banquet and insist on your own way, to reject the invitation while seeming to accept it, to walk into the Temple of the Most Holy God with a list of demands and begin remodeling.

That path leads to Hell and darkness. To be sure, we have all flirted with it. We have all set ourselves up as God’s judge. We have twisted His words to fit our mood, sometimes excusing sins that are convenient for us in the false name of the Gospel, as though we were more loving and kind than God, and other times, condemning those whom He loves in the false name of the Law, as though we were righteous and worthy to judge. We forget that at God’s heavenly banquet, we are guests. We don’t make the rules.

Good works are not the answer. They are important. They are fruits of faith. They are proof that faith is living, a demonstration of the love of God. For the love of God works itself out in the love of neighbor. Faith alone saves, and faith is not idle. It brings with it all sorts of blessings. Anyone with faith will perform good works. Anyone who does not perform good works has no faith. There is a subtlety here that must not be missed; for the devil builds all his lies around grains of truth.

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 7:9–11

Good works are only the proof that faith is living. They are not faith itself. They do not save or keep salvation. Your salvation comes at the word and grace of God who is worthy to invite and has the authority to forgive. The same grace that made you a Christian keeps you a Christian. Any self-analysis of good works will lead to despair because our good works are never completely pure. We always have mixed motives.

Ask yourself why you have come to Church today. Because hearing the Word of God is a good work. A part of you probably came out of guilt. You are seeking to appease God's wrath by works. Or maybe you want something from God. You think that you might stand a better chance of obtaining it by buttering Him up, like children trying to get on Santa's good list by a last ditch effort at being nice on Christmas Eve.

Some of you might be here without any thought at all. It is just a habit, or because this is the one place left in America where common people still sing together. You come for the music. Or you come because this is YOUR Church, founded by YOURSELF, or YOUR parents, the altar or the paraments or the Chalice is a memorial to YOUR family, or your had a hand in making them.

Pastors are not immune to these temptations. We must be on guard to see that we are not driven by the worst motives of all; motives like the felt need to just simply be seen at Church, or that things are just a part of the job and not really gifts for us also.

None of us has perfect motives while we abide in this fallen flesh. And it's not just our actions that need examination. Our thoughts are also included. Coming to Church is a good work, but we make it a filthy rag when we despise the Word of God while here. Do we dare to be bored in the presence of God? To daydream of evil things in the midst of holy things, of mammon, of flesh and food and fame? The important Law to garner, if you hear nothing else today, is that your salvation is not dependent upon your works. If your salvation must be kept by the goodness of your works, you are lost, because they will never be good enough.

Here is the irony. The greater your awareness of this: the greater your faith. Strong faith never says, "I am strong." Strong faith does not feel strong. It feels weak. When it feels weakest, when it is most dependent upon the grace of God, when it recognizes how frail it is, then it is strong. When you feel strong you are deluded and easily misled. Faith lives best on its knees, ears and mouth open to hear and receive the Word of God and forgiveness of sins.

Strong faith is not so given to praise as it is to confession. The devil seeks to drive you to despair by showing you your unworthiness. He wants to make you quit. But he is God's devil. Awareness of that unworthiness is actually good for faith. It directs the believer to the One who is worthy, to the Lamb who was slain for the sins of the world. The Law serves the Gospel.

The good news is that it doesn't matter why you came here today, how pure or impure your motives were, or how attentive you have been. You were invited. That is the objective reality. God wants you here. The holy angels conspired together to get you here. The risen Christ sent His messengers to bring you in. You are baptized. He has bestowed His Name upon you. He sworn an oath in His Name to you. He will not forsake or forget you. He will love you to the very end. He keeps His Word. He provides the garment you need. It is not your good works that are needed: it is His righteousness. He covers you with His works, His perfection and His grace, with His holy death and blessed resurrection. So it really does not matter how bad your motives were or how inattentive you may have been. He has been attentive to you. And He is here for you, in Word and Sacrament, to give you what you need, to keep you safe by faith in Him.

As a sure and perfect sign, this table stands ready to feed you with His own life giving body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins. For you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Come, the feast is ready. As you feast, may we pray together,

“As a branch upon a vine  
In my blessed Lord implant me;  
Ever of my Head divine  
To remain a member grant me.  
Oh, let Him, my Lord and Savior,  
Be my Life and Love forever!”<sup>3</sup>

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> From Eternity, O God TLH 411:5

**Prayer of the Church  
Twentieth Sunday after Trinity  
6 October 2024**

In peace, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For compassion, that the righteous and holy One of Israel would not deal with us according to our sins, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the spread of the Gospel in all places, that the Holy Spirit may be given, that we may proclaim the good news of Jesus and His Salvation, that God would strengthen and bless the work of mission societies like the LWML and LLL to support missions at home and abroad, that all Christians may be strengthened in their witness in word and deed in whatever vocations God has placed them, that many be rescued from the apathy of this world's ways and hedges, and that all may be gathered into the Church and brought to the eternal marriage feast of the Son, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the will of God to be done among us; for our homes, that generation after generation may walk not as unwise but as wise, redeeming these evil days until Christ returns; and for all Christian citizens of our nation, that in this foolish world we would be filled with the Spirit and submit to all authorities out of reverence for Christ, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the bread that satisfies, that God would provide for our every need of body and soul not because of our worthiness, but graciously on account of Christ, that God would look in mercy on those who suffer in mind or body, especially *Dick, Esther, Ruth, Ann, William, Zoey, Jeri, Pastor Small, Debbie, the victims of Hurricane Helene and those we name in our hearts*, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those whom celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially *Tanner, Alivia, Elijah, Major, and Nina*; and those that celebrate another year of earthly life, especially *Kris, Bev, and Chris*; that God would send His holy angels to guard and keep His children; that they may thank and praise him for the gift of life and for the protection and care He has provided; that God would grant them to grow in grace, continue to know His loving-kindness, abide in the confession of His care and protection, serve Him faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of His joys in heaven; let us pray to the Lord; **Lord have mercy.**

For all those invited to the marriage supper of Christ, that entering through the waters of Holy Baptism, they may be found worthy to taste His gracious feast already in this life, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

Spare us from all temptations, Lord, and deliver us from evil. In true repentance, lead us to forsake our wicked ways and unrighteous thoughts and return to You for abundant pardon, seeking You while You may be found, that when Christ returns in His glory, we may not be cast into the outer darkness but welcomed into His everlasting wedding hall by grace; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**