### “A Feast for All Peoples” Steve Finlan for The First Church, October 15, 2023

**Isaiah 25:6–9**

6On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food . . . 7And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; 8 he will swallow up death for ever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.

**Matthew 22:1–10**

1Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: 2“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. 3He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. 4Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ 5But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, 6while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them. 7The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. 8Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ 10Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.”

Welcome on this fall Sunday. We are sad because of the loss of our friend, June Hoyt. I’m going to give a sermon that she would have liked, I think, because it’ll be both faithful and realistic.

The Isaiah passage is really remarkable. To start with, it’s a feast for *all* peoples, and he will destroy “the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations” (25:7). Well, what *is* it that enshrouds all peoples? It could be death, or, more likely, the *fear* of death, since that is what afflicts the living. Also enshrouding people is sorrow, and it mentions in the next verse that God will wipe away the tears from all eyes. And finally, there is disgrace, which God will also remove. So whatever the shroud is that covers all the peoples, whether it is death, fear of death, sorrow, or disgrace, God will remove it. So this is one of the great end-times promises of the Old Testament.

Scholars have a name for this section of Isaiah, the Isaiah Apocalypse, covering chapters 24 through 27, believed to have been composed later than the surrounding chapters, and by a different author, since it brings in concepts not found elsewhere in Isaiah. In these chapters we see an affirmation of a general resurrection: “your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise” (26:19). Also there seems to be an end-times punishment of a great mythological monster: “On that day the Lord . . . will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent” (27:1). This may relate to the punishment of heavenly rebels mentioned in chapter 24: “On that day the Lord will punish the host of heaven in heaven, and on earth the kings of the earth” (24:21). Whoever the author was, the biblical tradition accepted these chapters as part of Isaiah’s writings, and so today we have these apocalyptic chapters of Isaiah.

I find them to be embryonic versions of the promises we have from Christ, of comfort for all peoples, of Satan falling, of everlasting life. The gospel reading for today is one of the parables of warning and judgment. A king has prepared a wedding banquet, but all the people invited have begged off, some of them even mistreating the messengers. The king is upset with those whom he invited, and decides to destroy their city and to invite, instead, anyone who can be found in the street, whether good or bad. It seems clearly to be a warning to the Jews, that if they don’t receive the invitation, there are plenty of others who will be invited and will come in. They already thought of the Gentiles as random individuals, good and bad, whom one might encounter in the street, and now they are told these people will replace them at the banquet for the king’s son. How embarrassing! To lose one’s status as God’s elect!

Parables like this one were probably quite shocking and controversial. They resulted in his enemies becoming more determined than ever to get rid of him. The image of the servants gathering everyone in, whether good or bad, meets with Jewish impressions of Gentiles, that it was hit or miss when you went to gather a bunch of Gentiles, a bit like grabbing a bunch of plants out of the ground; lots of them would be weeds, a few would be flowers. It’s funny how Jesus could accurately picture people’s prejudices, and in a way that could be laughed at. If *you* were a Jew, you could maybe laugh knowingly, and think, “yeah, that’s how we often think of Gentiles.” It actually can help people overcome their prejudices, when they see them as ridiculous. And if God really is accepting Gentiles into his family, that’s another reason to drop that prejudice.

Now we Christians have to watch out for that same prejudice, assuming that we are the chosen ones. What if Jesus came again? Would we be ready to greet him? Or would we say we’re too busy? So part of the message today is about being open and receptive to God’s new messengers, not being so self-satisfied and full of ourselves that we cannot recognize a new message of truth when it shows up. Humility and receptivity, then, are the message, along with hope, conveyed by the Isaiah passage. There is no distinction between Gentile and Jew in the Isaiah passage; God will dry *every* tear, remove the shroud of fear or sorrow or shame that is over *all* peoples. That’s a banquet *I* want to go to, the one where fear and sorrow are permanently banished, the one where all peoples are delivered from fear and sorrow. This is the Messianic banquet, a promise that should inspire hope and anticipation in your hearts.

So, go forth with trust in your hearts. Be an ambassador of Christ in this world, ready to point people to his teachings, which give hope. Know that you are loved and that you can pass on that love to others. But it all begins with trust in God.