

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

Second Sunday after Trinity (2021)

Do Not Reject the Lord's Invitation

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“Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God! . . . For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.” (Luke 14:15b, 24, ESV)

The Gospel Reading for today opens with a beatitude describing the Gospel gift made available to every believer, ***“Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” (v. 15)*** Both blessing and table fellowship are woven into one in this beatitude. Without question, the wording of verse fifteen calls to mind the Lord's Supper where the believer participates in that eternal eating of the messianic feast while receiving God's blessing through Christ: as St. Paul so clearly reminds us, ***“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16, NKJV)***

The Gospel places our Lord having dinner at the home of a Pharisee. The Gospels frequently display Jesus at table fellowship with sinners, this was an integral part of His ministry. He would use these occasions to build a bond with his fellow diners, creating fellowship with the people. Moreover, these meals were opportunities for sinners to be in the gracious presence of the Christ. These meals were more than just friendship meals. Jesus used them as opportunity to teach about the kingdom of God, while sharing a meal in an atmosphere of friendship, acceptance, and peace.

Too often, as we witness our Lord's desire to fellowship with man through common meals and teaching, we lose sight of the truth that when He does the dinner guests are in the presence of the Holy, Incarnate God, but only those whose eyes are opened by faith can see that God is present. So, in Christ, God is present with sinners gathered around table. It is through table fellowship that our Lord Jesus welcomes fallen man into His presence. Indeed, these meals are a foretaste of the new era of salvation where all are invited into the kingdom of God to sit and dine with Christ at the messianic feast, the Marriage Feast of the Lamb.

Moreover, these fellowship meals were also revelation, proclaiming the presence of the King, the Bridegroom. They were revelation as Jesus taught about the kingdom, especially as our Lord taught about the Lord's Supper, teaching the significance of the meal itself in terms of His sacrificial death – the giving of His body and the shedding of His blood – speaking of the future eating and drinking of His body and blood in and under the wine of Holy Communion by the faithful.

So, our Lord's table fellowship has significant implications in the ongoing life of the Christian church today. These meals of which St. Luke speaks in his gospel and in his book of Acts culminate in the Last Supper which gives birth to the Lord's Supper. It shows how the Lord's Supper became a central element in the worship life of the Christian church. After our Lord Jesus broke bread with the two Emmaus disciples on that first Resurrection Day, the church implemented the regular practice of gathering on the first day of the week, the day of the resurrection, to break bread; to receive the Lord's Supper.

Our Lord's table fellowship practice consisted of teaching and eating, thus setting the precedent for the church's worship life. These themes became the two main parts of the liturgy in the Divine Service: The Service of the Word (teaching) and the Service of the Sacrament (eating the Lord's Supper). This Gospel motif of Jesus' table fellowship informs the church of the vital importance of the Divine Service for sustaining her ongoing life in Christ. In Divine Service, Jesus continues to carry on His ministry of table fellowship, providing the communicants His salutary and holy body and blood in and under bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins, thus preserving His church on earth in the true faith. Thereby, the saints remain in communion with Him anticipating His imminent return when He will usher the faithful into the eternal Marriage Feast of the Lamb.

But as we see in the Gospel Reading for today, not all who are invited to this gracious meal accept the invitation, they have something else to do. To those our Lord Jesus says, ***"I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet."*** (v. 24)

In His parable of the Great Banquet Jesus tells us of a man who decided to invite all his friends to a great banquet. When the banquet is ready, he sends his servants to invite his friends, but they all had an excuse for why they couldn't come. It appears that his friends were not really his friends after all. One after the other they offer excuses, why they can't attend; "I just bought some land I must examine." "I just bought some livestock I must examine." "I just got married and I can't leave my wife." One after the other they opted out. Thanks, but no thanks. We know you worked hard in putting this banquet together, but we just don't have the time to come.

These excuse makers are those who have no time for the Gospel. You invite them to Divine Service, but they always find an excuse not to come. However, regardless of how good their excuses may be, nothing should keep one from attending to the one thing needful. How awful is their state, never able to taste the sweetness of God's pardon through Christ, never able to experience the peace of God or the glory of God. Never able to sit at table with Jesus.

Jesus tells us that when the master's servants tell him that those who were invited refused to come, the master of the house becomes angry and tells his servants to go into the streets and invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame. Do not discriminate, invite everyone you find. The message is clear, this is your call to evangelism. It is your call to go and invite others to come to Grace that they may share what you enjoy.

Having done what their master commanded they find there is still room for many more. So the master tells them to go where they have not gone, go into the highways and hedges and compel the people to come that his house may be filled, and that his feast may be enjoyed by many. Again, our Lord is telling you, don't think that just because a couple have accepted your invitation there aren't more to invite. Be continually inviting, be continually taking the opportunity to witness the Gospel to others, inviting them to Divine Service, inviting them to hear the Gospel proclaimed in its truth and purity.

So, yes, the mission cry here to evangelize the Good News of the Gospel cannot be mistaken, but we must be mindful of the opening verse of the Gospel for today, ***"Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!"*** When you evangelize, you must be certain that you are proclaiming the Gospel in all its truth and purity. The Gospel is God's Word of forgiveness. That Word which leads the sinner to repentance and salvation. If you muddy the Gospel proclamation with the wisdom and reason of man, it will not be the Gospel and it will not bring souls to salvation. If you're fearful because you don't think you know what to say or how to invite, the church is always eager to teach you, ask one of the evangelism team members or the pastor.

Wisdom and reason teach a synergistic message, teaching that man must help God save him. It teaches a Pelagian message which says only man can save himself, thus man must make the decision to save himself. Wisdom and reason always teach a false message which includes man in the formula of salvation. If this is your proclamation, it is not the saving message of the Gospel. It is not remaining at table with the Incarnate God who alone came into this world to save us from sin, death, and the devil. And if we do not remain at table with Him, we will find ourselves no longer listening to our Lord, but to one of the other guests, whose words will always point to human endeavor, words which cannot save. Their words lead to the rejection of our Lord's invitation to dine with Him and on Him. This leads our Lord Jesus to say, ***"none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet."***

Blessedness comes from eating bread in the kingdom of God, that which our Lord Jesus is ushering in now through His table fellowship with outcasts and sinners. Yet as we read this parable, we can see that it goes beyond simply expressing this tension between those excluded and those who attend the banquet. There is also tension between the present and future reality of the messianic feast. This end-time feast is both a future event and one that is already realized in the ministry of Jesus. The table fellowship revealed in the Gospel Reading for today prepares us for the full expression of this fellowship at the Last Supper with our Lord's disciples. In that meal our Lord gives us His body and His blood, and like at Emmaus, in the meal the crucified and risen Christ makes Himself known by His very presence.

"Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" Blessed is everyone who eats the bread of life in the kingdom of God's grace. Jesus said, ***"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."*** (John 6:35, ESV) When these words of Jesus are disputed, He doubles down, saying, ***"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."*** (John 6:53–56, ESV)

Now, no longer just a guest, a teacher, and a friend, Jesus offers Himself as the food for table fellowship. He says, eat of my flesh, drink of my blood and you shall receive the forgiveness of your sins and life everlasting. But many who heard doubted and refused the invitation. St. John tells us, ***"When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it? . . . After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him."*** (John 6:60, 66, ESV)

How sad that those who sought divine things desire instead to fixate on earthly things. Rejecting our Lord's invitation to commune with Him, to receive His body and blood in and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion for the forgiveness of their sins. How can this be, they ask? Jesus is only a man who now rests in heaven. How can He be in more than one place at the same time? ***"O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe!"*** (Luke 24:25, ESV) have you not heard the words of Jesus who says to you, ***"Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."*** (Matthew 7:26–27, ESV)

Therefore, Jesus still says, ***"I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet."*** (Luke 14:15b, 24, ESV) Do Not Reject the Lord's Invitation and do not reject His call to go forth and evangelize. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.