

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 (2022)

Excuses!

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“And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ But they all alike began to make excuses.” (Luke 14:17–18a, ESV)

The Gospel Reading for today begins with these words, ***“Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” (Luke 14:15, ESV)*** These words were uttered by one of the lawyers, legal experts of the Torah, or one of the Pharisees with whom our Lord was dining that day. But to their dismay they will find that their interpretation of what constitutes being blessed differs remarkably from what our Lord means when He identifies the blessed. To be blessed is to eat bread at the Lord’s Table in the kingdom of God, that kingdom which Christ is ushering in through His table fellowship not only with His children but also with those who will become His children, worldly outcasts, and sinners. To emphasize His teaching our Lord tells these lawyers and Pharisees a story of a man who once gave a great banquet and invited many. But sadly, all those who were invited gave one excuse after the other why they couldn’t attend.

Often it is taught that the banquet is a future event, but as we read the Gospel, we see that it is a current event, it is ongoing. In the parable Jesus says, ***“And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’” (Luke 14:17, ESV)*** Thus, in terms of the kingdom of God, God has set His table, He has prepared the food, and many of the guests have been seated. Regarding this banquet our Lord is speaking about the eschatological and eucharistic table fellowship, that which all in the kingdom of God will sit at in the eschaton and that table to which we are invited to dine at in this life, Holy Communion. But not all are there. Although they should be there, they have other things more important to do.

Excuses! Excuses! Excuses! Oh, thank you for inviting me, but I have more important things to do. Oh, thank you for inviting me, but your invitation conflicts with my interests, and my interests must come first. One after the other, those invited give excuses for why they cannot come, but these excuses are but shallow reasons for not attending. Moreover, they are an insult to the host, an insult which has consequences.

The servant who was sent to deliver the invitation to the missing returns with the sad news that all those to whom they brought their invitation, turned the invitation down. Angered by this report, the man said to the servant, ***“Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.” (Luke 14:21, ESV)*** Go to those outcasts of the city, those whom the lawyers and Pharisees would see as unclean and unfit to share table fellowship with. Go to those who are children of the kingdom, but who are looked down on, who are rejected by the so called, “ruling class.” This the servant did, but to our surprise, when the servant had completed his task, there was still room at the table, there were still unoccupied seats at the banquet. Learning this, the master tells his servant, now, ***“Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.” (Luke 14:23, ESV)***

In this command the servant is told to expand his lord's invitation to those outside the city, to those outside the church. He is told to go to the highways and hedges with the invitation and compel those outside the church to attend the banquet. Compel them! Yes, compel them. The Greek word here in Luke's Gospel is "ἀνάγκασον" which means to necessitate, to force, or to make.

Now some have trouble with this understanding. 'Oh,' they say, "our Lord would never compel someone by force to come to Him." But what does God's word say, "***The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness.***" (Psalm 45:6, ESV) Here we see the use of God's scepter, and we cannot analyze it with the world's scepter. The Lord says He loves justice (Isaiah 61:8), and so do we, but our understanding an imperfect one. Without Christ, there is no loving of righteousness nor hating of iniquity. When it comes to God's invitation, the excuses put forth by men are nothing more than shallow reasons trying to justify their sinful nature. Therefore, for the sake of their souls, the church is commanded to "compel" them to come to the banquet. But if they refuse, our Lord says, "***none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.***" (Luke 14:24, ESV)

The Gospel for today is a beautiful picture of the never-ending Christian Church, whose Master is Jesus Christ. Within that Church are servants who delight in carrying out His instruction, offering His invitation to dine with their Master. This invitation is carried to both family and stranger. Some have separated, having divorced themselves from the family, and thus refuse the invitation to dine. Others in the family have not divorced themselves, but they are like the seed that fell among thorns, becoming outsiders because, "***the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.***" (Mark 4:18–19, ESV) Yet the servants are told to take the invitation to dine even to them. Yet when this is done, our Lord says there is still more room at the table, and He commands us to go to those outside the church, to go to the lost sinner, the pagan, and compel them to come to the feast that they may not find themselves as outcasts on the day of Judgement.

This parable is truly instructive for all the messengers of the Gospel. Christ's servants are, with all urgency, to invite everyone to the Lord's table, while at the same time, preparing themselves for opposition, but this opposition cannot get in the way of fulfilling the Lord's command.

Taking Christ's invitation to the secular world and wayward Christians is a daunting task. As servants of His, He reminds you, "***If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.***" (John 15:19, ESV) Indeed, the world does hate you. The Christian Church has been persecuted since its inception. But should this surprise you since the One you follow, your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was Himself persecuted, even to the point of death, even death on the cross. But if worldly hearts are to be changed and brought to saving faith, not just invited, but actually seated at the Marriage Feast of the Lamb on Judgement Day, the invitation of our Lord must be carried to them by His servants, and worldly opposition cannot get in the way of fulfilling the Lord's command. Yes, you will face the hatred of men, but you are not to succumb to fear and begin to offer *excuses* for not fulfilling your call. Sadly many do capitulate to their fear offering *excuses* for why they cannot fulfill the Lord's command, or worse, they take on the heart of a Pharisee, seeing the world as unworthy of their effort, while still desiring to remain a member of His household, to "***eat bread in the kingdom of God!***" However, this unwillingness to compel the world to follow Christ has eternal, serious, negative consequences.

We sit here this morning elated at the Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe v. Wade. After nearly fifty years and countless numbers of innocent children massacred in the womb, the court finally had the courage to overturn this barbaric, ungodly law. But this would never have

happened if the servants of Christ had not fulfilled their calling to compel the highest court in the land to reverse their ungodly and murderous decision of 1973. Going into the public square, shunning the anger and rejection of the world, the servants of Christ sought to overturn this violation of God's Fifth Commandment, and they are celebrating today. Through prayer and perseverance, Christ's servants sought God's hand in overcoming abortion, and He answered their prayers. So as worldly creatures we see this as a victory, a victory over death, a victory for life. But the war has not ended. This war started in the Garden of Eden when the enemy of man, Satan brought sin and death into this world. Moreover, that war will continue until our Lord's return, and those who fight with Christ, who go into the cities and highways compelling men to come and dine with the Lord, will hear the victory trumpets, and be seated at the Lamb's table, eating bread in the kingdom of God.

In the Garden, Satan began a war against the family. Over the centuries this war has manifested itself in many forms, but none more insidious than the onset of the sexual revolution of the sixties. Since this satanic inspired revolution, we have witnessed a rise in fatherlessness, divorce, shrinking families, narcissism, and abortion. Moreover, the weapons the enemy uses in waging this war against the family continue to evolve. Today proponents of the sexual revolution insist that we must accept homosexuality, same-sex marriage, transgenderism, nonmarital sex, and many other identities relating to sexual appetites. These weapons, meant to annihilate the family, are aimed at removing the influence of parents, especially fathers, upon the cohesiveness of families. To achieve their goal; a society whose family structure is controlled by the state, they must abolish the idea of father and mother, sister and brother, grandfather, and grandmother, etc. They must instill the idea and the implementation of the collective headed by the state. They must close the minds of our citizens to the truth of natural law and the Law of God. But there is one great obstacle in the way, the Church and her Lord, Jesus Christ.

However, as regards the Church, many Christians, for fear of persecution, have become mute, silent in the face of evil. Some have even succumbed to the perversity of the culture. Today divorce is not only all too common, but statistics indicate that seventy percent of all divorce is now implemented by the woman. Our state institutions are indoctrinating our children at an alarming rate to the aberrant lifestyle of a godless culture. Therefore many children no longer see the family as a nurturing haven of loving relationships. Instead, they embrace the godless living promoted by proponents of the sexual revolution. "Look mom," because dad's not around, "my friends are doing it, why can't I? Look mom, what's wrong with same-sex marriage, what's wrong with living with my girlfriend or boyfriend, what's wrong with rejecting the teachings of the Church and accepting the teaching of the culture? If I go along with the culture, everybody likes me." The war is never ending. The consequences of refusing to be a warrior on the side of our great Master, Jesus Christ, is countless of souls in hell, including those of your own family. You cannot have two masters. You cannot live by the voice of Satan and the voice of Christ. Jesus makes it clear, "***No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.***" (Matthew 6:24, ESV)

The Gospel for today is your reminder that you are called to go into the world, into the public square and compel all you meet to come to the Marriage Feast of the Lamb. You are called to confess your faith, to promote and proclaim Law and Gospel to a world dying of sin. There are many ways in which you can accomplish this; one on one conversations with your family, friends, and neighbor, inviting them to attend Divine Service, and fully supporting all of the church's evangelical efforts to bring the Gospel message to a world dying of sin.

So no excuses! No more looking to your self-interest while refusing the command. No longer can you rely on repeating the Lord's name and claiming to be a servant of His while you offer excuses for not doing His bidding. To those who offer excuses for not doing the work of a

servant, Christ will say, ***“I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.”***
(Matthew 7:22–23, ESV)

So don't sit on the sideline or be an impediment to the proclamation of the Gospel. Instead, answer the Lord's command, as you were invited, invite others to the Marriage Feast of the Lamb. Show them the invitation, the sinless One who took our sins upon Himself, carrying them to the Altar of the Cross. Show them the One whose death freed them from sin, death, and the devil, that they may become your brother or sister in Christ, eating and drinking with you at the Lord's Altar rail, feasting on that which was given and shed for the forgiveness of man's sin, the body and blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ in and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion. Lead them to that blessed and divine meal, that great and blessed feast of which He desires all to come and dine, today and in the eschaton, the Last Day. Show them that our Lord says, ***“Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!”*** ***(Luke 14:15, ESV)*** In the name of Jesus. Amen.

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