

Luke 14:15–24  
2nd Sun. after Trinity  
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.  
June 18, 2023

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

A great banquet has been prepared and all people are invited free of charge. All expenses have already been paid by the host. There's nothing to do except show up and enjoy the "feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined" (Is 25:6). In a way this banquet of God's Kingdom is like a wedding reception. That's about the only banquet people really throw anymore. You are invited to a sumptuous meal free of charge, all in celebration of the new union between a man and a woman. The newlyweds simply want you to be there to celebrate with them. The invitations have gone out, but then the excuses start coming in. Family members and longtime friends aren't able to make it because of x y and z. You fill in the excuse. "We'll be on vacation then." "It's just too far to travel." "There's a tournament that weekend." Of course, some excuses are valid, but it's pretty easy to separate legitimate excuses from lame ones. Even so, it's considered impolite to say what we really think about the matter.

In our Gospel text for today, Jesus describes a similar banquet and uses it as a parable for the Kingdom of God. When the Kingdom of God is proclaimed and people are invited to God's House, the excuses will start coming. Many say: "I'll get to church someday," or "Next year I'll start reading my Bible." Many think they're too busy for the faith right now, but once things settle down they'll take it more seriously. They don't realize that "now is the favorable time . . . now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2). One of those who overheard what Jesus was talking about at the dinner party said: "Blessed is everyone who *will* eat bread in the kingdom of God!"

Jesus responds with this parable, taking the man's future statement and making it a present reality. It's true. "Blessed is everyone who *will* eat bread in the kingdom of God." But Jesus's parable says, in effect: Blessed is everyone who eats bread in the kingdom of God *right now*. Those who feast in the Kingdom of God here in time will also feast in eternity. But those who make excuses and neglect the feast here will miss out on the eternal feast to come. (cf. Lk 11:27–28).

Jesus says: "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. 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." The man throwing the banquet is God the Father. The many invited were first the Jewish people, called by the prophets, and then by Jesus and the disciples. The banquet itself is the Kingdom of God, not only in eternity, but here in time. The poor and crippled, the blind and lame are the ones you would least expect to find a place at the table, the ones Jesus and his disciples were ministering to in the entire region. Those out by the highways and hedges are the Gentiles. The call is already going out in the Gospel: come to the feast that has been prepared for you" for you, free of charge, and Jesus Christ Himself is the food upon which we feed by faith.

In the Bible, the word of God is often described as something you eat because the Word of God is lifegiving. The word of God is a banquet. It sustains us in our earthly pilgrimage. The Prophet Jeremiah says to the LORD: "Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts" (Jer 15:16). Or in Psalm 119[:103], David says: "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth." The Word of God is a sumptuous feast, each story and account, each historical record and proverb apportioned just right by the Holy Spirit, and all

coming together to give us exactly what we need and when we need it. That's why studying the Scriptures is such a delight! God's Word is a banquet we enjoy already right now.

And Jesus Himself is the Word of God, who was with God in the beginning. As we feast on the word of God in Scripture, so do we feast on the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself. That's why our Lord is often described to us as food. When John the Baptist said "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world," he wasn't just referring to the fact that Jesus would be the sacrifice for all sins. Under the Old Covenant, the sacrifice wouldn't just be slaughtered. The sacrifice would also be eaten. Jesus is the lamb of God, sacrificed on the altar of the cross and roasted by the fire of God's wrath, to be given to us to eat. We then feast on our Lord in His Word and in His Supper, for the forgiveness of our sins.

In John 6, Jesus is again described as food. Jesus says: "the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world (v. 32) . . . I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh (v. 51) . . . 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 (v. 55–56)." Our Lord Jesus, the Word of God, is Himself the true food. He gives us Himself to eat and to drink in the sumptuous banquet we receive here at His altar. And He invites all to come hear His Word, to "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8). Or as the pre-incarnate Christ invites in our Old Testament Lesson today, from the book of Proverbs [9:5]: "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight." Wisdom is saying: "Come, enjoy the feast of God's Word."

But those who were invited, the Jews (particularly the teachers of the Law), were foolish and refused to come, so the master became angry and sent His servant to the poor and crippled,

the lame and the blind. These are the outcasts our Lord and His disciples come to throughout the New Testament, proclaiming the Kingdom of God. But there's still room at the table. Finally, the master says: "Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled." These are the Gentiles, to which the apostles and the entire church were sent from Pentecost until the end of the world. The servants of God continue inviting all people into God's Kingdom, to the eternal feast that has already begun. And the same lame old excuses are still used.

"I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused." "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused." The cares of this world get in the way of attending to God's Word and God's Kingdom. So often, people get caught up in earthly pursuits to the neglect of the one thing needful: the feasting upon God's Word. The things that are secondary, like money, work, our time and resources, sneak into a primary role. Our fallen flesh tends to focus on the bread that perishes rather than on the bread that will last forever (John 6:27). We forget that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Deut 8:3).

And then there are more wholesome distractions, like family: "I have married a wife, and therefore cannot come." Family is a blessing from God, yet Jesus also says: "a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt 10:35). Jesus could just as well say: "Whoever loves husband or wife more than me is not worthy of me." Not even the greatest worldly gift our Lord has given you—your family—should take away from your commitment to God's Word and Kingdom. That "we must obey God rather than men" (Acts

5:29) includes denying ourselves and those of our own household, and taking up our cross to follow Jesus.

What our Gospel Lesson today shows us is that oftentimes people will excuse themselves from our Lord's banquet because they think they have more important things to do or because of sinful laziness. Whether it's because the Divine Service is held too early, or too late, or they don't like sacred music, or church is too far away, or because work or family take precedence, so often the invitation to attend God's feast is ignored for even the most trivial reasons. But that doesn't stop our constant inviting. "Come, everything is now ready." And when excuses are given, we keep inviting. And we go to others. We go to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled, the blind and the lame. We invite those who you would least expect to respond to God's invitation, recognizing that Jesus has come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32).

The master says to the servant and to the entire Church: "Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled." There's an urgency about this invitation. To reject it with any kind of excuse not only disappoints God; it angers Him. The call of the Gospel in this life is a matter of eternal life or death. At some point the doors will be closed. Those who eat the bread of life now in the Word of God and in the Sacrament will continue feasting for eternity. Those who refuse the invitation in this life will be locked out and cast into outer darkness and the LORD will say: "none of those men who were invited shall taste of my banquet." So you who have tasted and seen that the LORD is good, those of you who partake of the blessings of God's house and of God's Word everyday: Keep enjoying the feast, and in turn don't forget to compel the others. Invite them according to the seriousness of this invitation. Proclaim the feast to all, whether friend or foe, those you know or don't know, in

season and out of season, whatever your calling and status might be. There's still plenty of room at God's table, here at church and in God's Word, and there at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.