

Pastor Kenneth Mars

St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Second Sunday after Trinity

June 26, 2022

Text: Luke 14:15–24

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

During dinner conversation at a Pharisee's house, a participant exclaims, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" (vs. 15). We don't know exactly what prompted the dinner guest to make this statement except that it was in response to the things Jesus had been teaching. The verses just before today's text reveal that during this festive Sabbath meal, Jesus healed a man of dropsy (vs. 1–6). Thus Jesus taught it is lawful to show love to your neighbor even on the Sabbath Day. Our Lord also told the parable of the Wedding Feast in response to the petty ambitions of the dinner guests who were all competing with each to get the best seats of honor. Our Lord concluded by declaring that whoever exalts himself will be humbled. And who humbles himself will be exalted (vs. 7–11). And immediately before today's text (vs. 12–14), the Lord Jesus admonished the host, a ruler of the Pharisees, to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. They cannot repay his love and devotion. But God will in the resurrection of the just.

To all these things, a man exclaims, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" (vs. 15). It's a true statement, to be sure. But it seems to miss everything that had taken place. Loving God and neighbor. Humility and faith in God. At any rate, Jesus responds by giving another parable, today's text vs. 16–24, that teaches about the universality of God's love for all people. The Pharisees and his guest weren't interested in the poor, the crippled the lame, and the blind. But God is. He wants them to know Him, His love, and His mercy. Let's take a few moments to consider this great parable about God's kingdom.

Jesus said, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many" (vs. 16). Banquets and feasts of the ancient world were extravagant affairs. It took months to prepare. Animals had to be fattened months in advance. Extra food

had to be grown or secured by other means. Feasts in the ancient world were huge, joyous occasions. The highlight of the year or maybe the highlight of several years. This feast is the biggest feast imaginable. For it represents God's kingdom. Everyone is invited to come! And the day has finally arrived, "And at the time for the banquet (the man) sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready'" (vs. 17).

But the most shocking, unimaginable things happens. The invited guests won't come. The reasons given are reasonable enough. According to vs. 18–20, we find that one just purchased some land and must go see it. Another just purchased a yoke of oxen and he must examine them. Another man just got married. Not this time, please have us excused. It's shocking and scandalous! Everyone knew this day was coming. But they all said no when it arrived. Remember, this parable teaches us about Christ's kingdom.

Tragically, so many say no to God's invitation to His banquet. The excuses are pretty much the same. Too busy, there's not enough time. Other priorities must be attended to first. Please have me excused from the feast that is offered week after week in Christ's churches. Maybe in the years to come, when life is slower, then I'll be able to feast with Jesus. Excuses are given, but they ring hollow compared to magnitude of the gifts God offers.

It's here I want to pause and take a side path. Even as I rejoiced when I learned that Roe vs. Wade had been overturned, I found myself in the aftermath to be convicted for my lack of faith. The words of Jesus come to mind, "O ye of little faith" (Matt. 8:26). Though I prayed for it to happen, I must admit I didn't think I would see it in my lifetime. But here we are! Thanks be to God. Many unborn babies will be spared a horrific death. We rejoice that many, many women will be spared the life-long trauma and guilt of knowing they did not love their babies as themselves. We rejoice that many men will be required to learn yet again that true manliness is not found in the ability to get a woman pregnant. Rather, men who would be manly and courageous demonstrate such virtues by becoming a husband to the woman he loves. And a father who loves sacrificially the children he and his wife conceive together.

Though we rejoice that Roe vs. Wade has been overturned, more work must be done. More prayers must be prayed. More Christian witness to God's gifts of life, marriage, and family must be given. Once again, we Christians need to raise the banner of the goodness, beauty, and wonder of marriage and family. We must do again what the early Christians did when the pagans discarded their unwanted children. They saved them, loved them, and raised them as their own. Women who had been abused or abandoned were brought into families. Young men were taught discipline, virtue, and godliness. In today's epistle text, we heard the apostle John's admonition, "Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth" (I Jn. 3:18).

How this relates to today's gospel text is made clear when we remember that excuses were given as to why people couldn't attend the feast. The purchase of new property, new oxen must be examined, one couple got married (vs. 18–20). The common assumption behind all these excuses is that our lives, our bodies, our possessions belong to us. We can do with them as we wish. Claims upon my time, attention, or priorities can be nullified at will, including God and His kingdom. In the debate over abortion, have we not heard time and time again that it's a woman's body, she can do with whatever she wishes? And nothing has the right to alter her autonomy, not the child, not a man, not her family, not the larger community. Her body, her choice. Now such thinking is being used in the debates over gender identity and the very definition of marriage. I determine by gender at will; it's mine not yours. Not even my physical body can tell me my sex. My marriage is mine, to define, alter, and arrange as I see fit. It's my life, my property, my choices. Nothing can make any authoritative claim over and beyond my will and choice, not even God.

To all such thinking, the Christian Church must speak the truth. You do not belong to yourself. God makes a claim upon us as our creator. As Christians, Christ Jesus has redeemed your body and life by His own precious blood. Every baptized believer is a living temple of the Holy Spirit. The idea that we can do whatever we like, whenever we want regardless of the wishes of others is simply a demonic lie. Listen to I Corinthians 6:19–20, "¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from

God? You are not your own, ²⁰for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

Our natural inclinations are always to turn away from the good, holy, and pure. Never trust in your own power and strength. Instead, return time and time again to God’s Word, His Sacraments, His Church, the Lord’s Prayer, to our given sex, family, marriage, children, and all the holy things of God. I appeal by the mercies of God, humble yourselves before the Lord, set aside the excuses we so easily make, and seek His goodness in repentance and faith.

In the parable, the man offering the feast, who represents God, responds to the excuses with anger and determination. The ingratitude of some will not thwart His desire to be gracious. There will be a feast. More servants are sent out, “Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame” (vs. 21). The Lord Jesus sends out His preachers to everyone. Yes, the poor and forgotten, the marginalized and downcast; they will come. And they do.

And yet the master wants more! This is the banquet of all banquets. “Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet” (vs. 23–24). Dear church of God, we are the gracious recipients of Christ’s invitation! He would have us be here to receive all the riches of His kingdom! And we would have more come. So that together, He can give the healing in body and soul that comes from His love and forgiveness. Christ Jesus is the bread of life. By participating in this feast of His Word and Sacrament, you receive the life of God’s incarnate Son, the Lord Jesus who lived, died, and rose again to give us His kingdom.

There will be more feasting next week. Bring your family and friends. The blessed bread of His kingdom cannot be exhausted. What Jesus offers and gives you today, you, your friends and loved ones, the strangers you don’t know, all of them, all of us will need next week. And it will only be better. More joyous, more refreshing. The holy Christian Church is THE place of joy and feasting. Come, let us feast on the bread of life.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.