

The 2nd Sunday after Trinity
June 21, 2009

Rev. David A. Kind
University Lutheran Chapel
Minneapolis, Minnesota

✠ Jesu juva ✠

TO FEAST ON CHRIST

Proverbs 9:1-10; Ephesians 2:17-22; Luke 14:16-24

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

Our Lord gives a parable today in response to that which was said by one of those who sat at table with him: "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" Indeed those who dine in the kingdom of God are blessed. They have fellowship with God and live from His beneficence, their every need met, their every hope fulfilled. But our Lord is not content to speak of such dining only as it pertains to the future heavenly banquet. The parable He gives is one where the action takes place on earth and in time. The banquet, you see, which takes place in heaven is also partaken of here and now by the faithful who heed the Lord's summons.

And so in the parable the man giving the great supper has invited many people. Throughout the Old Testament we see the Lord feeding the people of Israel. As they went through the wilderness He sent them manna from heaven. He brought them to the land of promise, a land flowing with milk and honey. He shepherded them, and as He said in Ezekiel: "I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel." And what Israelite could



forget the account of Moses where the elders of the people actually dined with God on the Holy Mountain. And so the call went out to the people of Israel continually as we hear Wisdom crying out in proverbs: "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" As for him who lacks understanding, she says to him, "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Forsake foolishness and live, and go in the way of understanding." This is none other than the call of God through His Holy Word to repentance and to faith. And this call was sent to every person in Israel, the people to whom God had given His promises and His covenant.

Now it is a Sabbath day and we see Jesus dining at the home of one of the rulers of the people of Israel, a ruler of the Pharisees when He speaks this parable. And to them this parable must have smacked of warning, or perhaps even

of rebuke. After all, the ones who were invited at first in this parable are shut out from the great supper in the end, not having heeded the call to forsake their own ways and come and dine with the Lord.

There are three excuses given in this parable, each dealing with the various concerns that might draw one away from faithfulness to Christ and His Word. "The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.'" St. Augustine says that these three excuses refer to pride, the five sense, and the lusts of the flesh (Sermon 112). That may be the case, and certainly these can draw people away from faithfulness. But I think these things concerning which they make excuses not to come are just the stuff of everyday life. If one had to identify which each situation represented, then the piece of land would be property and worldly possessions. The five yoke of oxen would be business endeavors and enterprises of various sorts. And the last, having married a wife, is family and, perhaps, other relationships.

Certainly, as Augustine says, pride is part of the first sin and continues to be a snare to people today causing them to rebel against God's rule and even against His grace in that the prideful refuse to humble themselves to be recipients of that which rightly belongs to someone else, even if that someone is Christ. And the five senses certainly carry many people away into unbelief – not only the senses as they pertain to fleshly lusts and desires and but as they pertain to reason. Augustine says this is all about denying that which cannot be discovered or ascertained through the senses. "I do not believe, such a man will say, except what I can see." And with regard to the one who had taken a wife, here according to Augustine, we see the fleshly lusts which war against the soul, not that to have things of the flesh is wrong, Augustine says, but to love them such that they take a central place in one's life, pushing God and His Word aside and eventually out altogether.

But, You see, it is not only the things that are blatantly sinful that pose a danger to the soul, but also things that in and of themselves are quite ordinary and good. To have possessions is not a bad thing. How many of us, after all, have bought a piece of ground, erected a house on it, spent time taking care of it, improving it, or even expanding it? But this item includes more than land, it includes anything one may own, from real estate to motorcycles, from clothing to video games and anything before, after or in between. There is, of course, nothing wrong with having things. God gives us things to enrich our lives, to provide us what we need, and sometimes even to entertain us and occupy our free time. But let us not put our possessions or our concern over them ahead of faithfulness to God. Let us not love them in such a way that they become an encumbrance to the reception of His grace. This is why St. John says: "Do not love the world or the things in the world... the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."

"I have bought five yoke of oxen" another ordinary thing, a business investment that must be tended to. Is there anything wrong with getting involved in such things, whether it be the buying and selling of livestock or opening a woodworking shop (a pipedream I have sometimes entertained), or pursuing an MBA or whatever one must do to further one's career and income? No, there is nothing wrong with such things. Again, the knowledge and skills one has are a gift from God which He intends us to put to use. Work is part and parcel of the human life as God has designed it. And as we have opportunities to improve our ability to work or to earn, so long as they are honest and honorable, there is nothing wrong with pursuing them. God gave great success in business to many of the great men of the Bible, and those men used that success to God's glory and for the good of others. And when we do such things it is well pleasing to God. But for many the pursuit of business ventures and of personal success becomes such a consuming thing that it quietly but unrelentingly pushes Christ to the side. How many people have been drawn to another place because of a career move only to find that there is no faithful church nearby, and so their faith is weakened because it is not fed. How often do we hear of people pursuing some endeavor that will not allow them time to go to church at all? How many praying lips have been silenced and Bible left closed over such endeavors?

And finally, the taking on of a wife, refers to the role of family in one's life. Is having a family a good thing? Of course it is! Trying at times to be sure, but good, nonetheless. God instituted the family when He told Adam and Eve to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. The family is the place where we first come to know the goodness of God as He provides not only food, shelter, care and protection, but also catechesis as parents teach children the Word of God. And yet Jesus says just a few verses after today's Gospel "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." Now what does He mean here? Shouldn't we love and honor our parents? Shouldn't we treat our spouses well? Should we despise or abandon our children? Of course not. But we must put faithfulness to Christ and His Word before faithfulness to any human being, even the ones closest to us. He must come before husband or wife, before father or mother, before son or daughter. Putting anyone or anything before faithfulness to Christ and His Word is idolatry and unbelief.

And this is the point of Jesus parable. There are many who put other things ahead of Christ and His gifts of grace to us. What is this supper of which the parable speaks, after all? It is nothing other than Christ's grace. It is a feasting on His Word in faith. It is laying hold of His salvation through that Word. It is reading, studying, meditating upon it. It is coming to Church to hear it and to learn it and to grow in understanding of it. It is to put the richness of Christ and His grace before all other things, not that there is no place for them at all, but that all else is kept in right relation to that which is primary in life, fellowship with God by faith in Christ.

Luther explains in one of his sermons that this great supper the Father prepares is a feasting on Christ, who was put on a spit and roasted, so to speak, for us by being nailed to the spit of the cross and suffering for us. "For Christ was the world's genuine Bread of Life, for Jews and Gentiles alike. So now this heavenly food, so carefully prepared and subjected to the intense fire of the cross, is served up and offered to the whole world. Wherever Christians are gathered, there you find the table. The preaching of the Gospel is the dish. The servers are the pastors. Christ is the food. Through the pastor's mouth the food is laid on the table and served; for when the Gospel is preached, this food is served up and offered. It is embraced solely in the Word and is heard by both young and old, learned and unlearned, rich and poor, and the like. Each person receives just as much as anyone else in the world in only he believes, for it a food that fills and satisfies; yes, it possible for the whole world to have their hunger sated by this food" (House Postil for Trinity II, 1534). Yes, in this food of the Gospel, in Christ that is, we have a real meal by which we are given forgiveness of all our sins. Here we find something that truly enlivens us; even we who were dead in sin now have eternal life! Here is a supper which feeds us not just until the next day, but always and continually unto salvation.

And now this supper is for us, not just for the Israelites who first heard God's summons, though many if not most of them refused to come. The call has long ago gone out into our streets and lanes, our highways and hedges. And God wants His house to be filled. Let us continue to heed this call to come and feast on Christ and His Word. This world, and our lives in it, will put many obstacles and enticements in our path, using even the good gifts of God to turn us away from Him. Other opportunities and obligations will try to lure us elsewhere. But still the Gospel calls us to come and not be deterred. "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" And now through the Gospel the kingdom comes to us. Blessed are we when we heed this summons and feast on Christ through His holy Word and through the Sacraments. Blessed are we who taste of this great supper. Amen.

✠ Soli Deo gloria ✠