

Sermon Transcript for June 13, 2021

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

Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God. Today's Gospel reading is from Luke, Chapter 14, and it's a story that Jesus told during a meal at the home of a prominent Pharisee. One of those at the table with Jesus just happened to remark, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God." And Jesus took the opportunity to relate a story. It is a parable, and, of course, a parable is a story to illustrate an important truth. One of the great teaching devices that Jesus used was the use of the parable.

We need to talk about something called "table fellowship", and table fellowship is a recurring idea in the Gospel of Luke. It begins in the early part of the book, with people questioning Jesus, asking, "Why do you eat with sinners?" You see, Jesus was having table fellowship with this fellow named Levi. And of course, Levi was a tax collector, and nobody could stand him. They hated him. They hated him because of what he did. Tax collectors were not the most popular people in the ancient world. And as we go along and read these incidences in Luke, about what happens at table fellowship, we wind up in the 24th chapter of Luke, as the two men, after the crucifixion, are walking on the road to Emmaus. And they encountered a stranger who talks with them, and as he talks with them, their hearts are set on fire. And they are so intrigued by this man. When they get to their destination, they invite him to stay with them. "Lord," they said, "the day is getting on. It's getting late. It's going to be dark soon. Why don't you stay with us?" And He does. And so they sit at table. They have a meal together, and the stranger takes the bread and blesses the food and gives it to them. And Luke then says, "And their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him as the risen Christ."

So, table fellowship is an important topic for us to think about today. Table fellowship is the gathering of God's people who are of the same confession, and that confession is, Jesus is Lord. And they gather in love and fellowship around food. And we have the story of this master of the house who wants to have a banquet and invites many people. So we're going to talk about gathering around food, around the table, with each other in fellowship. Now, when we gather around our table fellowship, the food we eat here, we have to understand what kind of food we're talking about. The eating of food and the receiving of nourishment and strength is as close as we can possibly come to what God always does for us. Think of the Scriptures and the importance of food in the Scriptures. Remember, Jesus fed the 5,000 with fish and loaves. And when Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, He proclaimed to Satan, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." And we read in the Psalms, "Taste and see that the Lord is good."

And we have read of that tumultuous time for the disciples in the last supper with our Lord. And we sing about the marriage feast of the lamb and the feast of victory. And in 1 Peter, we hear these words, "Like newborn babes, crave that pure spiritual milk." So food has a lot to do with the Scriptures and a lot to do with spirituality. So God is continuously providing for our physical needs. He provides the food for us to eat, but He's also continually providing for us, for the soul, what we call the soul, that inner self that God knows more about us than we know ourselves. God sees us from the inside out. So the food that He provides is His very body and blood. And that's for the nurture and the vitality of our soul, for the strengthening of our faith, for the forgiveness of our sins.

Our table fellowship here is all about presence. We are here in table fellowship. We are present, but we are not alone, because He is present here as well. God is present here. Our Christ is present, according to His body and blood that He has given to us, that we might sustain our faith, sustain our strength, and sustain one another in fellowship. Presence. He also feeds us with His word, and the word is something that is sacred. It is sacred food for us. It feeds us from the inside out. For man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Now, let's talk about this story of the master of the house who invites many people to his banquet. There's some important points to consider here. First of all, this master is willing and generous, and he wants to give a banquet. Not only that, he wants to invite many people to his banquet. And so he sends his servant. When the time is right, he sends his servant to come to everybody, saying that everything is now ready. "It's time for the banquet. Please come to the banquet." Now, what does it mean that everything is ready for the banquet? What has been done to prepare for the banquet? You know what has been done. You know what has been done to prepare us for this banquet that we have regularly here in this building, in this holy place. It was nothing less than the brutal death of God's only Son, the bloody death of Jesus Christ on the cross. That is what has been done. That is what has been made ready. That is what has prepared the feast. But guess what? After the invitation has been given, and the announcement has been made that, all is ready. "So come on in.", Those who invited did not come, and they each had their excuse. "I've got to do this." "I've got to do that." "I'm too busy." "I just got married." One thing I know just about every pastor who's ever preached a sermon, he has heard a whole catalog of excuses, about why people do or do not do what they do. "Why have you not been in church?" "I'm too busy." "I only have a one day off." "I need my rest." You've heard them all. Perhaps, you've said a few of them yourself. I know I have. But excuses are one thing, but we have to remember the consequences of ignoring this gracious invitation to come to the banquet. Those who were invited, they did not come. They had something else to do. But the master, being who he is, urgently wants people to come. So, the people who were invited didn't come. Just like God's own people didn't come. Jesus was sent to His own people, and His own people, as John says in his prologue, "He came to that which was His own, but His own received Him not. They would not come." They ignored the invitation. But the master still wants people to come. So those who were invited did not come. So he said, "Look, I want you to go and invite the poor. Invite the crippled, the blind and the lame. Invite the handicapped. Invite the have-nots of the world. Invite the neglected of the world. Invite the forgotten of the world. Invite the ones that the world has passed them by. Invite them." And they did. The servant went and invited everyone he could find. All those who society didn't want, all those who were handicapped in some way, all those who were different, all those who had some deformity or some income imperfection of some sort, those were invited. And those were invited, and there was still room in the master's house. And the servant said, "All that you have asked has been done, and there's still room." So he says, "Expand your search. Search the highways and the hedges. And not just invite people, but compel people to come. Urgently, urge them to come. I want them to come. Don't just say, 'You all come.' Engage them urgently. Plead with them to come." You see, the master desires that his house be filled. And what we need to realize and understand today is that gracious invitation has not expired. It is still in effect. It is still valid. It is still as urgently needed and wanted as it was the first time He invited people. He still invites us. We need to listen to the invitation. We need to listen to the servant who says, "Come to the banquet. All is ready. The work has already been done. All we have to do is to come and partake of what He has for us."

But there is a grave caution. He said, "Invite these people because those who were invited then did not come. They will never, they will never enjoy my banquet. I tell you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet." See, Jesus came to His own people, and His own people did not receive Him. The Bible says, "But to those who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become the children of God." In other words, "Come to the banquet table. Enjoy. Enjoy what I have prepared for you." So listen to the invitation. He's calling to us. He's urging us.

But you know it can be hard to hear that invitation. There's so much noise in the world. There's so much anger. It's so complicated in this world, and you cannot hear the invitation, the gracious invitation. You can't hear it if you're so angry, you cannot just fit. You just got this rage inside you. I must tell you, I have a neighbor, two doors down from me. Wonderful man, lovely man, who would give you the shirt off his back. But he is convinced that this nation is done for. He is convinced that this nation is going to hell, and nobody can tell him anything else. Someone has told him how bad things are in the world, currently, and he has believed it, lock, stock and barrel. And when he believes that, he cannot hear this voice saying, "Come to the banquet. Come to my table. Come to my house." He can't hear that. He's so mad. He's so frustrated.

Now, I'm going to have to say this. You pray for me when I go home today, but I have to tell you, my wife was a nurse. She just loves when I talk about her in my sermons. She's a wonderful nurse, and she worked with wonderful nurses, and she worked with very, very smart people. And one of those smart nurses that she worked with, she's so smart, but she will not have herself vaccinated, because she says, her words, not mine, "I choose to live in victory, not in fear." Huh? She's the most fearful one of all of us, because she's afraid it's not politically correct to get vaccinated. That kind of a mindset will not allow us to hear the invitation, "Come to the table. Come eat at my house." There's human nature that is kind of resistant to things of faith anyway. People need to be convinced that this is a real thing for them. How do we nurture that kind of attitude that we can listen for, again, the invitation. First of all, we need to stay in the Word. You see, the Word creates its own hearing. The Word creates faith. We need to stay in the Word.

And that means reading it. And reading it a lot. And reading it often, and reading it in the morning, in the afternoon, at night, before we go to bed, when we get up. Living in the Word. And we need to stay in fellowship with one another. Let's face it. There are people who are in this congregation who are in widely different political spectrums, but we're still in the family of God. So we stay in fellowship, in love, with one another, not allowing these differences in opinion to shut us off from our fellow man. We need to stay in fellowship.

We need to stay in prayer. We need to stay on our knees. We need always to be listening to hear the invitation. The apostle Paul said it, "We need to pray without ceasing." Don't be without prayer. Be in prayer all the time. You don't have to be in the posture of prayer, but you need to always be on the beam with God. Let Him talk to you, and then listen to what He's saying to you. And He says, "Come. Come to the banquet. All is ready. All has been prepared. There is no cost. It's free. It's from me to you. The only cost is your life. Give your life to me," says God, "and I will give you rest. I will nurture you. I will give you food. I will sustain you. I will give you strength. I will give you fellowship. I will give you my fellowship. I will give you my table fellowship. And I will never, never abandon you. Never leave you as orphans."

So, my friends, we read this story of the master who wants, urgently, to invite everyone to his house for a banquet. Let's not refuse Him. Let's gladly, joyfully, thankfully, accept this invitation. Amen. Now the peace of God that passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.