

Sermon for Sunday, October 12, 2008
The Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 23)
By Tim Ljunggren

First Lesson	Exodus 32:1-14
Psalm	Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23
Second Lesson	Philippians 4:1-9
Gospel	Matthew 22:1-14

Has anyone here ever bowed out of a dinner party that you really didn't want to go to? What excuses did you use to get out of it? Did your host or hostess believe you? Or, did they know what you were doing?

This morning's gospel lesson is all about a dinner party; Jesus uses the example of a great wedding banquet as part of a parable that's designed to teach his followers about the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus talks about a king who throws a pretty heavy-duty shindig; it's a pretty fancy affair, by the sound of it, and the king tells his servants to invite the "high and mighty" of society to help him celebrate. Yet, despite the grand nature of the party, no one wants to come; the king commands his servants to "Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.' But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them."

Wow...how's that for declining a dinner offer? Talk about ingratitude.

Yet, despite all of the rejections, the king still maintains—and adds to—a guest list; he decides to invite street people, both good and bad, to come to the wedding banquet. Soon, the hall is filled with people who are enjoying the feast, people who take the king up on his generous offer and come to the party prepared to have a good time.

We are ourselves are offered an exceptionally rich fare at the table with this parable. Of course, Jesus is getting the point across to us that the mystery of the kingdom of God is disclosed as itself being a banquet. God's love excludes no

one from the enjoyment prepared for all human beings. We all have place settings at the table, don't we?

As is the case with many of Jesus' parables, the story which is the gospel for today may have but one point: we are a people who must live into abundant living. God provides for us a rich feast from which to draw nourishment; God is like the great king in the story who prepared a banquet for the wedding of his son. The wedding, of course, is the union of God with humankind in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The wedding banquet is an apt symbol of the fulfillment which comes to human beings by sharing in what God provides for us, and by our own relationship with God. Of course, there are those who reject God's call to them, and they're represented in this particular parable by those who were too busy to even hear the voice of the king calling to them.

But, to what does this particular parable call us? What will accepting the invitation cost us? To share a meal with anyone presumes a commitment to the person whose guest we are. It includes subscribing to the meaning of the occasion being celebrated. For us to say "yes" to God's invitation on this Sunday means being willing again to put on the mind of Christ and to follow his mode of behavior. This may entail having our usual set of values turned upside down in some area of our lives where we don't expect it. In some area of our lives, it may involve a new dying in order to enjoy fuller life in the power of Christ.

Celebratory in nature, God's call to all of us is a reminder of our covenant—our promises that we make and renew through our own Baptismal Covenant. God asks us to receive the divine invitation with a ready heart and an open mind; to do less would be simply to decline the offer to live fully in complete union with God through Christ. With this particular parable, Jesus reminds us that we are a "thanksgiving people"—a people who live into the resurrection of Christ with grace and love and the redeeming properties of forgiveness. God always calls to us, always offers us the invitation of eternal life—and we're the ones that have to train our ears and our hearts to hear that call everyday of our lives.

Last week, during the opening Eucharist at our diocesan convention, I was given the honor and the privilege to be both the celebrant the preacher of that event; I talked to the gathered congregation about the importance of all of us recognizing ourselves as Resurrection People, people who expect the unexpected from our God, people who expect good things as part of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, there are those who are like the people in today's parable that are

simply too busy to hear God's invitation—you can usually tell who those people are by the negativity that seems to surround them and their inability to share in what God provides for us as a feast of celebration. Pointing fingers instead of pointing their hearts toward Christ, they maintain an attitude of indifference or worse. They miss not only the banquet that God has prepared for them, they also miss the chance to reconcile themselves to the one Holy and Living Lord who asks them not to despair, but rejoice.

Today, God—through Christ—points toward celebration; today, God—through Christ—points us into the direction of plenty. The reality of having our ordinary lives become part of the greater glory of God calls us to the banquet that's been set. The mood is festive, despite the rejections we may have already given to God—God's voice still rings out to us, and all we have to do is accept the invitation, with no excuses this time.

Amen.

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