

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

We are privileged at Zion. We feast every Sunday not only on God's Word, but also on our Lord's Holy Supper. Dr. Art Just from the Seminary calls it the "Ongoing Feast," a rich feast of forgiveness given us as we partake of Christ's body and blood, as we confess: "[g]iven and shed for [us] for the forgiveness of sins." Yes, we come forward to the altar laying aside all pretense, humbly kneeling before the Lord as sinners in need of His Divine grace. We wear repentance and faith, the garment of salvation that the Lord Himself clothed us with; we wear the robe of Christ's own righteousness which He gave us in the waters of Holy Baptism. We come at His invitation, the bad and the good to the banquet table the King has prepared for us.

We eat, and we give thanks for this wonderful meal, and yet we are not completely satisfied, for we know there is yet another meal to come. Here in time, the Lord Jesus graces "our table with [His] presence," and gives us "a foretaste of the feast to come," as one offertory in *Lutheran Worship* put it (Divine Service II, First Setting, p. 169). But there in eternity, in what is yet to come, is the fulfillment of the feast that Isaiah told us about, a feast with rich food and well-aged wines, a heavenly feast where death is swallowed up, tears are wiped away, and reproach is no more. Jesus speaks of it as He tells His parable of the wedding feast in today's Gospel.

This parable follows right on the heels of last Sunday's parable of the wicked tenants. So, Jesus is still in Jerusalem, still preparing to travel the sorrowful road to the climax of His sojourn on earth that accomplishes our salvation. The cross looms large for Jesus, but He can see to the other side of cross and grave. He can see past His resurrection and ascension to His return and to the calling of people to the eternal wedding feast.

A King gives a wedding feast for His Son, but rather than use the figure of the bride, in this parable Jesus talks about the invited guests. Some had already been invited; they only needed to be informed. Servants were sent out: the feast is ready; come to the feast. But these dishonored and insulted the King and His Son. They wouldn't come ... they refused the King (that's so hard to imagine) ... *they were not willing*.

Much like in last Sunday's parable, the King tried again. He sent out more servants. This time some ignored the call and went about their business; others mistreated and killed the servants. Surely, the chief priests and Pharisees, who had come to understand that Jesus had told the previous parables about them, could understand that this first part of the parable also had them in its sights, and it would not end well for them. In the parable, the King became angry. He sent forth His army and destroyed them.

Surely, the King went to extraordinary lengths to include them at the wedding feast. By no fault of the King, they would not come. Surely, our God “*desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (1 Tim. 2:4). Yet, not all are saved; some people reject the truth; they reject God’s Son. By this rejection and nothing else, they are deemed unworthy; they are destined for destruction.

In Jesus’ parable, servants were sent out again, this time, not to inform but to invite those who did not receive the first invitation: tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners. That’s right, for remember, much to the disgust of the Pharisees, Jesus ate “*with tax collectors and sinners*” (Matt. 9:10-11). They were hearing the invitation and responding. The wedding hall was filled with everyone the servants could find, bad and good. We might call them manifest and garden variety sinners — doesn’t that describe us?

One thing was necessary for these invited guests, too. They could not disrespect and dishonor the King. They had to wear a wedding garment. Thus, when the King surveyed the assembled guests, He discovered a guest who refused to don a wedding garment. The King sent him bound hand and foot to the outer darkness.

Dear friends, here we are at church — I pray not here, but we acknowledge that “*hypocrites and evil persons [may be] mingled [among the saints and true believers] in this life*” (Augsburg Confession, VIII:1). We acknowledge, it could even be your pastor — please pray for me. But that doesn’t affect what God does here. He comes today to serve up a foretaste of the feast. We’re here for the rehearsal; the time for the wedding feast has not yet arrived for us. Bad and good, you have heard the invitation and have come; today’s the foretaste. But how have you come? Are you wearing the wedding garment of salvation? Have you come in repentance and faith. Are you clothed not in a soiled garment of your own self-worth, but wearing the spotless garment of your baptism, the worthiness of Christ, the robe of righteousness that He has put on you?

If yes, then you are ready for the call that is to come, for remember, today is the rehearsal. The wedding feast will soon be ready. Come, today and eat the foretaste and be strengthened as you await that day when the trumpet shall sound, the cry shall go forth, and the dead shall be raised. Be strengthened that you will answer that call, saying: “*Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.*”

I want to conclude with a bit of poetry from Martin Franzmann, from a hymn he wrote for the 450th anniversary of the Reformation that made it into *Lutheran Worship*, but not *The Lutheran Service Book*. It’s not well known, I think. The music is a bit more difficult than our normal fare. We set a rather sumptuous table

of hymns here, but we've not sung it at Zion in the last 20 years. In his poetry, Franzmann paints a picture of this parable:

O kingly Love, that faithfully Didst keep thine ancient promises,
Didst bid the bidden come to thee, The people thou didst choose to bless,

Refrain: This day we raise Our song of praise, Adoring thee,
That in the days When alien sound Had all but drowned
Thine ancient, true, and constant melody,
Thy mighty hand did make A trumpet none could silence or mistake;
Thy living breath did blow for all the world to hear, Living and clear:
The feast is ready. Come to the feast. The good and the bad,
Come and be glad! Greatest and least, Come to the feast!

O lavish Love, that didst prepare A table bounteous as thy heart,
That men might leave their puny care And taste and see how good thou art, ...

Refrain

O seeking Love, thy hurrying feet Go searching still to urge and call
The bad and good on ev'ry street To fill thy boundless banquet hall. ... *Refrain*

O holy Love, thou canst not brook, Man's cool and careless enmity;
O ruthless Love, thou wilt not look On man robed in contempt of thee.

Final Refrain: Thine echoes die; Our deeds deny Thy summoning:
Our darkling cry, Our meddling sound Have all but drowned
That song that once made ev'ry echo ring.

Take up again, oh, take The trumpet none can silence or mistake,
And blow once more for us and all the world to hear, Living and clear:
The feast is ready. Come to the feast. The good and the bad,
Come and be glad! Greatest and least, Come to the feast!

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