

THE INVITATION TO THE LORD'S SUPPER
Luke 14:15-24; Trinity 2; June 12-13, 2021

[GREETING]

The weekly Divine Services with the Lord's Supper at St. Paul, Fairmont, are Saturday at 5:30 PM and Sunday at 9:00 AM in the summer. Consider yourself invited to attend.

That seems a strange way to begin a sermon. You in the pews clearly have accepted that invitation. Consider this your invitation to return again soon and keep coming back regularly. On any given weekend, most of the members on our church rolls and most residents in our community don't attend worship in person. Do they think that they are not invited to attend worship, or have they chosen not to accept that invitation? I'm not referring to those who long to be here with us but poor health, weakness, or disability prevents them. I am talking about those who could be here but have chosen not to attend, or are too lazy make the effort, or have made up excuses for not attending.

Making excuses is the issue that Jesus deals with in His parable today from Luke 14. A man, the Lord and Master of a house, invited many to attend a supper, described as a banquet or feast, but when the time came for the supper to be served, those invited gave excuses for not attending. The master in the parable is God, and the supper people are invited to is the Divine Service of the Church now as well as the everlasting feast with God in glory that is coming in the future. The warning Jesus gives is that those who have no time or inclination to accept the invitation and attend in this life will not be allowed to feast with Him in glory. To put it bluntly: those who refuse to come and received God's gifts for them in life will die and go to hell forever. Based on Jesus' Word, excuses, which people offer so glibly, will get them nothing except God's anger and eternal wrath.

“A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to

examine them. Please have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry.

Let’s look at those excuses that God rejects as a sign of lack of faith in Him.

‘I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.’ This “field” could represent anything we buy or possess in this life. It is sinful for us to make our possessions and taking care of them more important than accepting God’s invitation. This is true whether we have a lot or very little. Some people have so much stuff it takes all their time and energy to take care of it or use it for their pleasure. Others have nothing at all, complain about it, and spend their time coveting what others have. It is not a sin being either rich or poor, but if your wealth or poverty is your excuse for refusing God’s invitation, God’s condemnation of you will be the same.

‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.’ Going to work is the excuse here. “I’ve got more important business to take care of than coming to receive what God has for me here.” Years ago this congregation added a Saturday evening worship service for those who might have to work Sundays, or are busy doing something else during Sunday services. My observation is that people who don’t have time to come to church are able to make time for all sorts of things besides work. People work and play so hard that they are too exhausted to attend church. What do you think God is going to say to the one who whines when facing God the Judge, “But Sunday is the only day I got to sleep in!”

And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ Having family obligations is the excuse. A number of our members in their 20s and 30s have moved away from the area, gotten married and started families, but have never joined a church near where they live. If you care so little for God and His gifts that you won’t find a faithful Lutheran congregation that you and your family can join and attend, are you still a Christian? It is the responsibility of Christian adults to find a faithful congregation for them and their family members to join and attend regularly.

“Watch out! Pastor Bertram is back at it, going after those who don’t come to church! Why is he making such big deal of this?” The better question to ask is why the Lord and Master in the parable, who is God Himself, became angry at those who made excuses for not attending. “Shouldn’t God just lighten up and let us decide for ourselves what best for us? What’s God’s problem?” you might be wondering. Let me try to explain God’s perspective in this.

This is not, as some people might think, a matter of God’s rules and laws. It’s not really that pesky Third Commandment, “Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy.” God is actually quite understanding about sinners breaking His commandments. God knows our weaknesses and propensities to sin. God knows we are born sinners and will continue sinning according to our nature. God’s anger is not so much directed against sinners because we are breaking His laws.

Rather, God is angry because we reject the Gospel, the Good News of our forgiveness of sins for the sake of His Son, Jesus. It was Jesus who suffered all of God’s anger and wrath on the cross in our place. God is angry because He freely gives life and salvation to us for Jesus’ sake and we think there are more important things in life than receiving those gifts. God is angry because we act as if this is no big deal in our lives but something optional when it is convenient to us.

Imagine that you are a prisoner who has been locked up for years, and you are told that the jailer with the key to free you is coming by in the morning to let you out, but only if you are awake and waiting by the door of your cell at that time. I bet all of you would go to bed early the night before, set your alarms, and be awake and waiting at the right time and place, eager to be set free.

God sent His Son to die and rise to free us from our bondage to sin and death. In the absolution God “looses sins,” unlocks us from the shackles of our sins and sets us free. In the preaching of His Word we hear the sweet Gospel that we are not condemned for our sins but forgiven and received as God’s own children. God then invites us the Lord’s Supper, the “**great banquet**” of His Son, to feast on Jesus’ body and blood.

A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ That, dear Christians, is a Gospel invitation. God has done everything to prepare this feast of forgiveness for us. He has held back nothing, not even His own Son, to save us. Now is the time and this is the place of His invitation. If that’s not good enough for you, what is?

When Jesus originally told this parable He was dealing with a bunch of folks that were actually pretty good at obeying God’s laws, but had rejected Jesus as their Savior. They were basically good, law-abiding folks and good neighbors, but hypocrites. They couldn’t stand hearing from Jesus that they needed saving by Him, that they needed to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins, that they needed to sacrifice the life and stuff that they had accumulated for themselves and follow Jesus.

Jesus’ invitation to the feast of the Lord’s Supper can only be accepted in person. If you think there’s nothing wrong with watching the live-stream “pajama service” at home when you could be here in person, you are making excuses. If you think that the Lord’s Supper of Jesus’ body and blood is an optional extra for Christians, then you think that Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross was an unnecessary waste of your time. But God did not think it a waste to send His Son to die on the cross, even for a world that would mostly reject Him.

God has no time for our excuses. He will fill His banqueting hall in the end. The Lord **said to His servant, ‘Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.’** Jesus meant the Jews of His day who were not hypocrites but knew they needed salvation in Christ. **And the servant said, ‘Lord, what You commanded has been done, and still there is room.’** **And the Master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that My house may be filled.’** God tells the Church now to invite all who need saving and bring them in. The Gospel invitation needs to go out into the whole world.

Divine Services here are at 5:30 PM Saturday and 9:00 AM Sunday. **‘Come, for everything is now ready.’** Amen.