

Sermon February 23rd 2014
"Jesus Feeds"

Matthew 22:1-14

1 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: **2** "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. **3** He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. **4** "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.' **5** "But they paid no attention and went off--one to his field, another to his business. **6** The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. **7** The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. **8** "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. **9** Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' **10** So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. **11** "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. **12** 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. **13** "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' **14**"For many are invited, but few are chosen."

Matthew 24:1-14, 36-44

1 Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. **2** "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." **3** As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" **4** Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. **5**For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ, ' and will deceive many. **6** You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. **7** Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. **8** All these are the beginning of birth pains. **9** "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. **10**At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, **11** and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. **12** Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, **13** but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. **14** And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. **36** "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. **37** As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. **38** For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; **39** and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. **40** Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. **41** Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. **42** "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. **43** But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. **44** So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, God's Son our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

Many thanks to you all for such a warm welcome this morning and to Pastor Jay for the invitation to preach. My wife and I have felt so blessed the few times we have been here to Pilgrim, or encounter your members in the Columbia community, so it is a wonderful blessing to share in worship today, and a privilege to proclaim the Gospel within this community.

As we walk through this season of Epiphany, we get brief montages in our weekly readings about the person of Jesus, snapshot images and brief clips that reveal to us what it means that Christ is the Son of God. In reality these are little epiphanies, small revelations or windows into the nature and character of God in Christ. Now, as you all have seen throughout the first

parts of this sermon series, Jesus often inverts things, flips them around, in order to point to Himself and the Kingdom of God. If any of you missed this in previous weeks, don't worry, so did I. But over the past few weeks, in His teaching, His healing, and His blessing, Jesus juxtaposes common expectations with Kingdom revelations. Of course we know that murder is unacceptable, but according to Jesus, anger is incompatible with Christ and His kingdom. In the face of disease and death, Christ's Kingdom is a place of healing, fullness, and radical life. Rather than ostracizing the weakest members of society, Christ's Kingdom holds the poor, the widow, the outcast, and the children as vital members of the society. In this epiphany season, we see the radical reorientation that is required by the Kingdom of God, and the radical reality that this otherwise obscure Jewish man is actually the God of the universe.

Here today, we find Jesus telling a parable, one that is explicitly about feeding the guests of a great wedding feast, but one that is really about the person of Christ and the kind of Kingdom that is coming with Him. Like the rest of the Epiphany stories, this story is much more about inversion, about the story behind the story, about flipping expectations on their heads.

And it is not mistake that this teaching happens the week that Jesus walks toward the Cross. Jesus tells this parable soon after Palm Sunday, likely a day or two before his Last Supper. Jesus has just received a king's welcome into Jerusalem, but he knows that the ultimate inversion, the crucified God, is coming to turn the world upside down, so Jesus takes to teaching about his identity as the Messiah and about the character of God's Kingdom, so that people might recognize the drastic difference between the kind of king they are expecting, and the kind of king that Jesus is.

And so we find out that God's Kingdom is like an epic party. I can dig the metaphor so far, but we immediately see that the kingdom of God is like a party that many people simply ignore. They not only refuse to come, but Jesus says that one goes to his field, and another to his business. Rather than enjoy slow cooked brisket and fine wine, they decide to go back to tedious work. Apparently, the Kingdom of God is a place that people just don't comprehend, where people just don't see the significance of the invitation, and so they return to the monotony of work rather than a blessed meal with friends. And even more than a refusal and a return to work, others seize and murder the messengers entrusted with such a gracious invitation. Rather than enjoy Sabbath rest to refresh and renew, people prefer violence that destroys. This sounds all too familiar. How often do we prefer isolation and violence to the celebration of life in the community of God?

Part of what we see here is that God desperately wants to feed people, and doesn't give up easily on them, which is something totally alien to our way of thinking. As my wife and I prepared for our wedding, when people chose not to come to our reception, we missed them, but we didn't send ambassadors to remind them of their welcome. We had fun anyway. How often do people actually pursue guests simply to bless them with food and fellowship? Many of us like throwing parties, but if people refuse, we're not going to put a lot of time and energy into double and triple checking. But God, God desperately wants us to participate in the feast the Father throws for His son's Wedding. God becomes a missionary, sending out servants to make sure that people feel welcome, even the most disinterested or violent among us. God welcomes all to the wedding feast, but God won't force us to attend. The feast is phenomenal, but God will not coerce us to taste and see. God's desire to feed is

persistent, and God goes to great lengths to welcome those who are invited.

At the same time, God is not satisfied with an empty banquet. As a good host, God wants a good party, and a good party requires grateful guests. So even after some refuse to attend and others respond in violence, God still deeply desires to feed us, and so in the parable the master sends even more servants out to invite anyone. ANYONE. There's not a lot of ambiguity here. Luke tells us that the servants "gathered all the people they could find, both *good and bad*." Good AND bad?! There's no one left out of the invitation. How unlike our parties!

And that's part of the parable's point – Jesus is inverting the concept of welcome amongst God's people. Jews in that day would commonly exclude Gentiles as well as Samaritans, anyone who didn't fit their concept of acceptable people, of God's people. Gentiles were considered outside of God's

blessing, so that at least makes some sense, but here's the strange thing about Samaritans. *They're also Jews*. In fact, they're the descendants of the Jews who were left behind after the Babylonian exile. You see, when Babylon conquered Israel, they took a number of people into exile, but only the religious, political, and economic elite. All the common folk were left behind, and so the Samaritans are the descendants of the commoners and the poor, the ones that Babylon didn't deem worthy. They're like the cousins from the Midwest that no one really wants to talk to because, well, they're not quite as polished as we are, not quite as economically stable. They're like Cousin Eddie in National Lampoons. Always showing up and never welcome. And when Israel returned from exile, rather than celebrate a reunion with their lost brethren, they embraced the same kind of prejudice against the Samaritans.

But in the parable, ALL are welcome. Even Gentiles. Even Samaritans. God wants to feed even those we want to ignore, even those people we oppress. This is a major inversion, and we know this. When is the last time we threw a party and invited all the poor? Actually walked Main Street and Sunset to welcome those begging for food? Those sleeping under the river bridges? When do we intentionally breach the barriers of race and culture, economics and education? We really like to party, but we love to party with people like us. But God wants to feed everybody. God wants a party where everybody is welcome, whether we think they're good and bad, because at the table of Christ, only one is good, and that is God alone. God's desire is to feed everyone, and there are no exceptions.

But this radical, ridiculous welcome does not come without expectations. In fact, when the master comes upon someone not dressed for the occasion, this man was thrown out into the

darkness. He lost his place at the table of grace. “Many are invited,” says Jesus, “but few are chosen.”

You see, Jesus feeds, but Jesus doesn't feed indiscriminately. There are expectations for participation in the feast. There are expectations for life in the kingdom. The question that Jesus seems to push into our laps, then, is how do we clothe ourselves at the feast of Christ? How do we prepare to participate in the Kingdom of God? But this is not a justification to only welcome those who look like us. Jesus is not concerned with whether you're wearing three piece suits or skinny jeans. This is another inversion in the story. The master can't expect to invite those in abject poverty and for them to have wedding clothes comparable to his. Notice what the parable says – the guest wasn't wearing wedding clothes at all, and when confronted, he was speechless. The guest came unprepared for

the party, came indifferent to the gift that was offered, and he knew it.

For us, the question isn't what clothes are we wearing, but are we coming to the party prepared. Are we putting on authenticity, or are we dressing ourselves in lies? God's desire is to feed us for the Kingdom, and this means that we cannot enter the feast unchanged. But again this is about much more than clothes. Are we coming to the feast with humility, or with pride? Are we openly thankful for the invitation or full of self-righteousness because, in our minds, we deserve a seat at the table?

The wedding feast offers a window of God's Kingdom, and the unprepared guest finds out quite quickly that while we receive the invitation in our places of sin and selfishness, of pride and self-righteousness, we are invited out of those places and into the throneroom of God. This is the Gospel in this hard

passage. We are invited out of pride and into God's perspective, out of self-righteousness and into a feast of absolute selflessness. The feast is about sinners becoming saints. And if we refuse to accept the robes of blessing that mark us as God's beloved, if we deny the clothing that Christ offers to prepare us for the feast, then we refuse our place at the table. We choose the darkness over the party. We choose emptiness over God's deep desire to feed us, not only with food, but with Himself. Many are invited, but to be chosen is to die to ourselves, to rise in Christ, to become citizens of the Kingdom of God. To be chosen is hard work, it is costly grace.

But even so, Jesus feeds. Like stubborn children, we sometimes refuse the meal because of we refuse our place in the kingdom. We don't want to give up our lives in the world for life in the Kingdom. But Jesus is persistent in wanting to feed us. He will, again and again, send messengers to invite us to the

feast. The Holy Spirit is that missionary that constantly approaches us, wooing us toward the table of grace. Jesus wants to feed everyone, so we must come with humility and recognize that, along with all others, our invitation comes at the will of grace because we just don't deserve it. And Jesus feeds with a purpose, to shape us for the kingdom of God. The food that Jesus offers is good food – bread and wine, body and blood. But it is food that works to change us from the inside out. This feast is about sinners becoming saints, and we cannot wear the trappings of sin into the throneroom of the King, because Jesus has already buried those clothes. He left them in the tomb on Easter Sunday. But most of all, the feast is about Jesus, the one whose death and life free us from pride and open us to humility, the one whose suffering and resurrection takes our sinfulness and invites us into sainthood. Why would we wear the clothes of sin into the Kingdom of God when Christ took those raggedy

garments from us, and traded us robes woven in His righteousness?

Jesus feeds with a purpose – that we might become more like Him. That's who Jesus is: the one who wants to share His blessing, to share His identity, to share His unstoppable love with absolutely everyone. Praise God that Jesus feeds. Amen.