

*Alleluia, Christ our Passover is Sacrificed for Us
Therefore Let Us Keep the Feast, Alleluia*
Matthew 22:1-14

Alleluia, Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the feast, alleluia! The priest and people speaks those words as the bread is broken at the Eucharistic Prayer. Theologically it states a paradox. On the one hand we remember that God's own son was tortured and publically executed for our sakes, nailed between two planks of wood. On the other hand Jesus himself gave us this meal to remember him. So, for us, this sacred meal of Jesus' Body and Blood is *a feast*, a celebration.

Once again Jesus spoke in a parable, this time telling of a great wedding banquet that a king threw for his son. It is an especially timely story as we have experienced our own royal wedding this year in the marriage of Prince William of England and Kate Middleton, the new Duchess of Cambridge. The royal wedding was a moment of great pomp and pageantry, viewed by hundreds of millions of people around the globe. It was undoubtedly one of the most viewed spectacles of all times. While the wedding was accessible to just about anyone on the globe through the mediums of television and internet it was not an event open to the public. Getting a seat in Westminster Abbey was one of the toughest tickets anywhere. Not even President Obama got one. There was no need for the Queen of England to go out on the streets and squares of London to try and find people to attend this wedding! As it was the crowds were so thick that unless you camped overnight you weren't even likely to have a spot where you could even see the procession from Westminster Chapel to Buckingham Palace.

What does the wedding banquet in Jesus' parable symbolize for God's people? If a village wedding banquet was the event of the year for people in the village, a joyous feast that everyone was glad to share, then imagine how important the king's banquet would be. Imagine even further if God were to throw a banquet for all the people of the world. The feast – the banquet – is a metaphor for the enactment of God's love. One day at the end of time the prophets had proclaimed and the Hebrew people come to believe, God's reign would be fully enacted in history and God would throw a great banquet where God's people would feast forever.

I'm a *foodie*. I love to eat savory foods and hearty wines and enjoy them with people I like. One of my favorite shows is the Faith Middleton *Food Schmooze* on Wednesday afternoons. "*Here's to pleasure my friends,*" Faith concludes each week, "*and remember, never eat more than you can lift.*" If you love to eat and share great food and drink and conversation with people, then a banquet is a powerful symbol of the embodiment of God's love.

The wedding banquet is also a symbol for the end of time, when God will literally reign on earth. But it's not only a symbol about God's love enacted at the end of time, it also a symbol of G's love enacted **now**. We see God's love enacted for instance in this feast – the Holy Eucharist, where we receive his Body and Blood and share in Communion with God and one another. We see God's love enacted wherever 2 or 3 are gathered together in Christ's name he is there in the midst of them. We see God's love enacted when we

have the opportunity to learn about God in study groups and Bible study. We see God's love enacted when we have the opportunity to serve someone else in Christ's name. We see God's love enacted when we share love and fellowship together. Whenever and wherever and however God's great love becomes enacted in our midst is an occasion to participate in that heavenly banquet.

Can you imagine receiving an invitation to the royal wedding and turning it down because it interfered with some every day appointment? *Dear Queen Elizabeth I'm sending my regrets. Unfortunately I have a dental appointment on the day of your son's wedding and cannot be present.* But don't we do just that every time we are invited in to participate in some deep way in the embodiment of Christ's love, if we ignore the invitation or if we turn it down? The words to a Steven Curtis Chapman song say it well.

*I never did like the word mediocre
I never wanted it to be said of me, oh, no
Just point me to the job and I'd go over, over
Looking for the very best that could be
So what is this thing I see
Going on inside of me?*

*When it comes to the grace of God
Sometimes it's like*

*Refrain: I'm playing Gameboy standing in the middle of the Grand Canyon
I'm eating candy sittin' at a gourmet feast
I'm wadin in a puddle when I could be swimming in the ocean
Tell me what's the deal with me?
I know the time has come for me to
Wake up and see the glory*

*Every star in the sky tells his story, oh
And every breeze is singing his song
All of creation is imploring
Hey, come see this grand phenomenon
The wonder of his grace should take my breath away
I miss so many things when I'm consumed with (trivia)*

(repeat refrain)

What do we need to wake up and see? What part of God's feast are we missing?

There is an actual feast that many of us are in danger of missing. Our Harvest Ball is next Saturday evening, a festive evening of music, dancing, fine food and good friends celebrating in style our beautiful new Middle Building and through the evening entertainment supporting the next phase of repairing the kitchen and dining room. I hope that this is one feast that very many of you will keep and enjoy together as a parish community. It's exactly the sort of evening that will help us grow in community. If

anyone cannot afford to come I have several free tickets that others have purchased for you. There's no excuse if you are available not to come.

The second part of Jesus' parable of the wedding banquet involves how we are dressed. The King has demanded that his banqueting halls be filled and his servants have invited everyone in, both good and bad. There is no social order, no aristocracy, no basis for anyone to be at that feast other than the king opened up his banqueting hall for everyone to come. So, we are invited to the feast of the enactment of God's love. But even at this wide-open feast it turns out that there are some standards. The king goes through the hall and finds someone inappropriately dressed. He has his servants bind that man hand and foot and tossed out into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Being properly dressed refers to wearing the garment of salvation. Have we put on Christ? Are we wearing the practice of prayer, the service of others, the love of neighbor, the practice of praise? At the royal wedding there was great focus on people's hats and wedding attire. Those with silly looking hats or odd choices of clothes were skewered by the media. Will the King at the great heavenly banquet at the end of time see us clothed with his love or wearing some other less appropriate attire?

You'll notice that it is only the king and not his servants who select who does and who does not belong at the banquet. Although it's the habit of many Christian groups and individuals to select who is in and who is out of god's favor, Jesus makes it clear that that is none of our business.

There is a great feast to which we are all invited. Our invitation comes not because we belong, but because God wants his banqueting halls to be full. It turns out that everyone is welcome. There is a great feast to come. We also begin to share in that feast even now in this life as we share Christ's great love and power enacted among us.

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