

The Second Sunday after Holy Trinity  
Luke 14:15-24

Jesus is at a feast at some man's house. This isn't unusual. There were a lot of itinerant preachers in Jesus' day. There still are today, really. But in Jesus' day it wasn't uncommon to have different teachers teaching their little group of disciples. If a teacher was popular enough, he caught the attention of the religious leaders and the wealthy. The teachers would be invited over for dinner to see if they were worthy of the wealthy and powerful men's time or not. I'm sure you can imagine what happens most of the time. Itinerant teachers are dependent upon wealthy patrons to keep up their work. I'm sure many were very political and tried to impress with their teaching while flattering their hosts. This is not the way of Jesus, however. He immediately insults his host by chastising him for only inviting over his friends and not including the poor. On the heels of that, we immediately get today's Gospel reading. One of those sitting at the table with Jesus tries to sound all pious: "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" v. 15) Jesus responds with the parable of the great banquet:

[Jesus] said, "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 and 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.' And the servant said, 'Sir, 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. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'" (vv. 16–24)

This parable is greatly misused by many in the church to separate the mission of the church from the church itself, which we will get to. First, let's look at what Jesus is saying before we get to the application.

The great banquet is the kingdom of God in glory. The event of the great banquet is the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ when He destroys forever sin, death, and the devil, and makes all things new. He has already done this with His victorious death and resurrection, but it won't be consummated until He comes again in glory! The invitation for the great banquet goes out by the church. And remember, we're talking about the Old Testament church. The religious leaders and the wealthy are supposed to be inviting all Israelites to the great banquet. The religious leaders and wealthy at this dinner are only inviting who *they think* is worthy, which is, you guessed it, other religious leaders and wealthy. They had forgotten the sick and destitute. They had forgotten the fatherless, widow, and sojourner. Now Jesus was coming to invite all Israelites to the great banquet and the religious elite and wealthy make all manner of excuses as to why they won't accept Jesus as the Messiah. Now Jesus is commanded by His Father to invite everyone to the banquet... the sinners, the sick, the destitute, the fatherless, widows and sojourners... and even the Gentiles! And Jesus warns those at this wealthy man's dinner, that those who reject the invitation to the great banquet, as they have done, will be cast away forever.

Jesus loves these religious elite and wealthy. He died for them too. The atoning sacrifice of Jesus is for all men, even the wealthy. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) No one is worthy to come to the banquet, especially those who think they are worthy on their own merits. The religious elite and wealthy thought they were keeping the law and thought that they were blessed by God because of their position and wealth. If you read the sermon on the mount without imposing any doctrine onto the sermon, you see clearly that Jesus says no one can keep the law of God. He says your righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees, including the Pharisees. (Matthew 5:20) You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:48)

But the invitation to the banquet is an invitation based on God's lovingkindness and not on the worthiness of the one invited. Jesus says, "Come to Me, all who

labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30) God desires all men to be saved. (2 Peter 3:9) God desires “that the wicked turn from his way and live.” (Ezekiel 33:11) This includes the religious elite and wealthy Jesus is chastising at the feast of our Gospel reading. He chastises them because He loves them and desires them to repent and believe the Gospel! He desires that you to repent when you sin and to keep believing the Gospel. Jesus desires you to live confidently resting in the promises attached to you in your baptism!

When Jesus ascended, He established His church as His loving presence on the earth. The church is to baptize and proclaim the Word of Jesus. The invitation for the Great Banquet continues to go out into all the world. Jesus also established the feast of His body and blood as a foretaste of the great banquet that is to come. When we partake of the Lord’s Supper, we proclaim His death until He comes again in glory. That is, we proclaim the wonderful work of Jesus through His death for the forgiveness of sins. This proclamation goes out to the sick and destitute. To the fatherless, widow, and sojourner. And yes, this proclamation goes out to the elite and wealthy as well. Your participation in preaching and the Lord’s Supper serves as a witness *for* the work of Jesus and as a witness *against* those who despise Jesus and His work.

This is the application of the parable of the great banquet. Pastors go out and invite everyone to the feast. Christians participate in the life of the church and act as the body of Christ in the world. Without pastors, the official invitation fails to go out into the world. Without Christians, there is no place to invite people to join the body of Christ. But God always provides pastors to proclaim His Word. And God always preserves a remnant as the body of Christ. The church may fail in a particular city or town, but the gates of hell will not prevail against God’s church. We may see but a remnant in a God-forsaken state like California, but we are here and we will remain here until Christ returns in glory.

The mission of the church is the mission of God’s people. We must not separate the mission from the church. There are many missions in the world, and all of them will fail unless they are connected with a local church, even if that church is a

simple house church in the middle of the African savannah or in the middle of a congested city in China. God's people always congregate around preaching, font, and altar. And when they fail to gather around God's means of salvation, they fail to be the people of God. There are the outlier cases where God sustains Christians who are separated from pulpit, font, and altar through no fault of their own. The Word of God is powerful. Yet, these are outliers. This situation most likely does not exist yet in the United States.

Why have so many Christians separated mission and the church?

It is primarily the fault of an error of doctrine that crept up on the church and even plagues modern translations like our beloved ESV translation. It is colloquially known as "every man a minister." It was even promoted by a book from CPH back in the 1970's. Thankfully, they have stopped publishing a book that has such bad doctrine. It revolves around a misunderstanding of Ephesians 4:11-12. Let's look at the Bible text that is so misused:

And [God] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, [These are all New Testament words for pastor... in other words, we can say that "God gave pastors"]

to

- 1) equip the saints,
- 2) for the work of ministry,
- 3) for building up the body of Christ,

[modern translations remove the comma between "to equip the saints" and "for the work of the ministry" to read "to equip the saints for the work of the ministry." But saints don't do the work of the ministry... they receive the work of the ministry done by pastors. The historical and proper reading of this is that the pastors equip the saints, do the work of the ministry with the means of Word and Sacrament that God mandated, and it is for the building up of the body of Christ. This doesn't elevate pastors or denigrate laymen. The pastor is in an office to do the duties of that office...]

until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. (Ephesians 4:11-14) That is, you are built up by the Word and Sacraments so that you can persevere as Christians until our Lord returns.

When every man is a minister, no man is a minister. You effectively hamstring the office of the pastor and you place unfair burdens on laymen. And it gets silly. Your pastor is not your spiritual father as Paul describes it, but is your spiritual buddy. I am not your buddy. You know that I want you to call me pastor or Pastor Maggard and not Pastor Bill. It is my absolute joy to serve you, but I'm serving you as your pastor. The title of pastor reminds both you and I that I have certain responsibilities towards you. It is my duty to deliver to you Christ and His Sacraments. On the other side of things, you can no longer run a coffee shop... you must have a coffee ministry. You can no longer just have a dog... you must have a comfort dog or some such thing. You can no longer just be a teacher... you must be a "commissioned minister." And there are so many so-called ministry organizations outside of the church. Some are indeed helpful, like Issues, Etc., but so many are useless and do nothing to actually support the church. If you lose sight that the ministry of the church is Word and Sacrament, you eventually destroy the very thing you're trying to support.

So, what does this mean for evangelism?

The pastor is not the only one who confesses Christ and what He has done. Every single Christian is expected to confess. As Peter says, "always [be] prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect." (1 Peter 3:15) Jesus also says, "Everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I also will acknowledge before My Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny before My Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 10:32-33) Furthermore, God expects all of us to teach His Word to our children. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) So, as you are able, you share the Word of God with those whom God has put into your life.

But you also bring them to church. Church is where Christians are made and fed. Church is where preaching, also known as teaching, and the Lord's Supper are delivered to the saints. When you engage with unbelievers in the community, your goal is to bring them to church with you. And you not only bring them to church, but you show them what we are doing. Handing someone a hymnal is not enough. The church doesn't look like the world or its ceremonies. The church's ceremonies go back 2,000 years. They look foreign to modern eyes. At least to the eyes of an unbeliever.

Sadly, many churches have abandoned historical worship for something that looks like the world. If the church looks like the world, it has nothing to offer the modern pagan. Let's face it, Nashville, Hollywood, Ted Talks, and Starbucks do it much better. And what do Nashville and Hollywood and Ted Talks and Starbucks have to do with God and His kingdom? Many polls and my own experience show that young pagans want something other worldly. They want something rooted in history. They want something rooted in a foundation they've never known. We have that!

Certainly, if someone were to download my sermons, they would never invite me to lead a Ted Talk. Certainly, our singing will never win any kind of earthly reward. Certainly, our architecture will never really impress like the old gothic churches. But we do have something eternal. We have what every sinner needs: the Word of God, both the Law that condemns and the Gospel that heals. We have the bodily presence of our risen Savior in, with, and under bread and wine. We have the very Word of God that is efficacious in season and out of season. We have what every sinner needs: the grace of God for sinners.

But pagans don't seek after God. They cannot. When anyone seeks, they seek their own pleasure. They seek intellectual superiority. They seek food that delights the senses. They seek all manner of sexual gratification like the beasts of the field. They aren't seeking the eternal. They aren't seeking the good, true, and beautiful. They aren't seeking true solace for their sin-plagued lives. They must be brought to church. They must be confronted with the Law of God. They must be taught everything that God has done to save them. They must be fed with the food of

immortality found only in the Lord's Supper. This is our job. And it's not an easy one.

Adult conversion takes a long time. And the obstacles that we face are great. But God promises that His Word doesn't return void. (Isaiah 55:11) God promises that your efforts won't be wasted. You may not see the fruit of your labor this side of glory. As Paul says, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." (1 Corinthians 3:6) God adds to the church. He works through both you and I so that His Word is proclaimed in Rialto and the surrounding communities. And God will use that for His glory to build up His church.

So, let us not grow weary. You are not called to grow the church. You are called to remain faithful in the spheres of life God has placed you. Your efforts will not be in vain. You may not see that fruit of your labor in this lifetime, but in the life to come, you'll be amazed at how God used His Word that you confessed. What a wonderful day that will be!

In Jesus' name. Amen.