

The Invitation
Sermon for the 2nd Sunday of Trinity
Sermon Text: Luke 14:15-24



When one of those who reclined at table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!”¹⁶ But He said to him, “A man once gave a great banquet and invited many.¹⁷ 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.’¹⁸ 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.’¹⁹ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.’²⁰ And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’²¹ 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.’²² And the servant said, ‘Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’²³ 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.’²⁴ For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.’”

What happens if a note, email, or telephone call somehow slips my mind, and I forget an important appointment because of this? Despite the most modern ways to communicate, such things happen again and again. And then we have to endure the angry reaction of the person we were to meet: “You messed up our appointment! We had coordinated everything so precisely! 3:00pm at my house. And you promised that you would come. That’s why I had everything prepared. And all of that for nothing! How can you disappoint me like this?” Such conversations... they belong to the realm of nightmares. Because of such instances, friendships and relationships are hurt and can even break apart forever!

In our sermon text today, it’s about a broken relationship due to such an invitation. At the same time, not all the guests had bad intentions. They all wanted to keep the appointment; they hadn't forgotten it. There were just other things that were more important. The reasons for this are also understandable. When someone has just gotten married, it’s understandable that the wedding takes precedence, right? What kind of invitation could be more important than a wedding day?

Regarding the five yoke of oxen, one could ask why the oxen couldn’t graze alone for one evening. But the excuses are ultimately not the most important thing. The key point is this: The living God invites us, and we find other things more important than the living Creator of heaven and earth! It is God who is the Source and Creator of everything. God is the host. He is the one who richly provides for us every minute of every day and who protects us from many known and unknown threats. Therefore we shouldn’t ignore Him. Jesus showed us that God the Father is the host and has satisfied people in many ways – He gave them bread, He addressed their very practical needs, and helped them with their physical hardships. Meanwhile, the invitation remains constant and unmistakable: “Come to me...and I will give you rest.” (Matt. 11:28) And what happens when the people don’t come? What happens when we don’t hear Jesus’ voice at all? In our modern society, there are always more propositions and stimuli so that people hardly have time to come and rest. Each person has a multitude of things to accomplish and demands on his or her attention. The modern excuse giver is often so caught up in his own world that he no longer understands what is good and beneficial for his own life. Despite this, God invites them. His invitation is not a summons or coercion and yet, the consequences are catastrophic if we don’t go along with His invitation. If we don’t accept God's invitation, something else will take God’s place in our lives. And these idols are not friendly hosts who want to satisfy our body and soul, but they are destroyers who want to pull us underground. Yes, ignoring and pushing aside the Living God is therefore an open door for all the evil that happens to us. We will no longer sit at His table but must remain alone, we must hurry and frantically obey this voice or that one. In the end, loneliness, fear, and self-destruction remain. All this ultimately stems from the fact that we don’t have the living God as number one in our life.

There is though one thing that should make us especially contemplative. Those who are ultimately struck from the guest list are the best friends of the living God. At that time, Jesus naturally means His Jewish contemporaries. The people of Israel were God's chosen people. They knew the prophetic writings. They knew exactly what God's Word had to say about God and the Messiah, Jesus Christ. They had accepted the invitation and understood what it was all about. Yet, they didn't recognize Him when the Messiah finally came. Sometimes they politely excused themselves, but mostly they rudely and disrespectfully rejected Him, insulted Him, and eventually even sent Him to His death. So God's best friends are those who rejected the invitation from the living God. They should know best what it's all about because they have been part of it from the beginning. How upsetting it must be for the living God when we, who call ourselves His children, consider other things more important! Unfortunately, this parable resembles us very much. Seeing this invitation in action, I see countless ways we politely but firmly reject the living God. What is the most important thing in your life? Who gets first place on your list of priorities when you're planning out your schedule? If you only have one hour in your weekly schedule for God, are your priorities lined up right? Unfortunately, this frustration carries on into other areas of life. God often only gets 98th or 99th place in my financial plan. The parable sadly very closely resembles us, and the reaction of the living God is shocking. Those who should actually belong there are excluded. "None of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet" says the living God. From this, we recognize that at some point, God's invitation is no longer addressed to us. Yes, that is shocking! We were baptized, confirmed, and have continuously experienced the blessing of God's Word without restriction. God's Word is freely available to us: we can pray at any time, go to church, take the Bible off the shelf to draw on God's strength. The generations before us didn't always have it as easy as we do and people in our time and world don't have it easy either. Some who accepted God's invitation, pay for it with their lives. And we, who are so richly blessed, often regard the Word of God as just a little side event with baptism, confirmation, weddings, and funerals. Sometimes, I even hear the shocking words: "I'm confirmed. I know everything there is to know... and that's why I know that I don't need all of this!" The parable that Jesus tells us here touches those of us who call ourselves friends of God.

What is even more remarkable, is that God's banquet will happen in any case. If we don't want to be there, other guests will be invited. While we are so petty and find all kinds of excuses why we don't need to come to God and don't need Him, our living God knows no limits. For every single person in the world, our living God could find millions of reasons as to why he or she should not be part of His celebration. None of us deserve it, but our living God is not as petty as we are. He isn't ashamed to invite the dirtiest, most unkempt guest to His banquet! The doors are opened wide and the poor, crippled, blind, and lame come in from the alleys. It is important to know that, according to the understanding of that time, this exact group of people were thought to not belong in the temple. The crippled, blind, and lame were considered as "unclean" and were not allowed to enter the temple. Jesus' parable turns conventional understanding on its head and lets the last become first and the first become last. This parable is written for you and me. Jesus shows us a glimpse into the workshop of the living God. God issued an invitation to us. I can only weep again and again in humility at how carelessly we treat what is holy! In prayer, I plead with God that I may be counted among those who are present at the great banquet! God wants to invite all of us. But not just us. He opened the doors wide and wants to invite everyone. Thankfully, disabled people are not considered "unclean" these days. They are sincerely welcomed into the church. We even try to provide handicapped accessible entrances and bathrooms so that people with disabilities can also participate in worship with us. When it comes to the poor, things look a little different. I can imagine how some people today react to such people: "Should we really spend so much time working with people on the streets and in the alleys? Is there any point? They only come here to eat and drink!" And some say about immigrants: "They just come to church because they want a residence permit in Germany, and once they get it, then they're gone!" That's what prejudice sounds like these days! Jesus turned the conditions of entry into the kingdom of God upside down. He still does this. Who are we to stand in the way with our haughty notions? And he really wants us to go to everyone! No one should be excluded. Yes, especially when it comes to those who are rejected by others, we should warmly welcome

them. Because these people also belong at the banquet according to Jesus' plan! It's going to be a party, I have no doubt about that. God's banquet can't be missed, that's for sure! Amen.