

“The Great and Glorious Supper of the Gospel”

St. Luke 14:16

June 21, 2020

SERMON 1921

by Michael David Henson

Our sermon text is from Luke 14:16, “Then He said to him, “A certain man gave a great supper and invited many....”,”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Those who trust in their own righteousness for salvation will not be saved. Salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ who died for the sins of the world.

Today’s Holy Gospel records Jesus’ interaction with those who falsely claim not only to be saved, but proudly declare themselves to be holy and righteous apart from Jesus. For those who are ignorant of salvation, Jesus gently teaches them their sins and invites them to receive his free gift of salvation through faith. Many of the poor, the sick and outwardly sinful came to believe. However, for these Pharisees who deny their sin and boast in their supposed righteousness and holiness from the law, Jesus gives them some harsh words of warning. The last words of Jesus’ parable are directed at them. Though they claim to be blessed and going to heaven, **Jesus says, “...None of those men who were invited shall taste my supper” (v.24). Ouch.**

I know that this response may sound harsh to some Christians. However, Jesus says this because He loved these Pharisees very much. Jesus is trying to warn them of their lost condition before it is too late. **He wants them to turn from the evil way and accept the invitation to eat the supper of the great and glorious gospel! Only those who trust in God’s Son will taste the heavenly banquet. Only those who inwardly digest the good news of the gospel while here on earth, will enjoy the eternal banquet in heaven.**

In today’s Holy Gospel, Jesus is sitting at the table of an earthly supper provided by one of the rulers of the Pharisees. The Pharisees did not invite him for the purpose of hearing his teaching or being taught by his message. In the verses before today’s text, it says that **these men were “watching Jesus closely” in order to catch him doing something wrong.**

Second, these Pharisees were comparing their actions with other Pharisees and choosing their places at the earthly table based on their own estimation of relative righteousness. Once again, trying to wake them from their self-righteous holiness, **Jesus tells them to have some humility.** Jesus says, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (v.11).

Third, Jesus sees that their supposed “generousness” is nothing but one rich man giving gifts to another, who then does the same right back to the first. It is not generousness at all. **Jesus tells them that if they want to be generous, they must invite those who cannot repay them**—the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. That is the kind of action which is truly generous.

Finally, Jesus tells **a parable about a supper**. This supper is not really the Lord's Supper, nor any earthly supper. It is the heavenly banquet, which is really just being in heaven with God. After telling these Pharisees the truth that they are not saved, Jesus warns the large crowd who were following him concerning the cost of discipleship. Jesus ends the entire chapter with the words, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (v.35b). **Jesus wants them to hear his words, repent of their works-righteousness and trust in the good news of Jesus' atonement for the sins of the world.**

Our heavenly Father has been preparing a supper ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin. The plan was devised before the creation of the world, but our God has been putting everything into place, so that at just the right time He might send His Son. The Jewish nation was given advanced notice that the Messiah would come. They had invitations to trust in the Gospel promise. They were to be a light to the Gentiles.

Galatians 4:4-5 says, "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."

Finally, after years of waiting, the Father proclaimed the completion of His gift of salvation. John the Baptist burst on the scene and declared that Jesus was "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Jesus came proclaiming the good news that whoever believed in Him would have eternal life. He even did miracles to prove that He was the promised Messiah. Finally, Jesus performed the perfect sacrifice.

Jesus preaching is described as "Come, for all things are now ready." The Apostles would go out preaching the good news of the forgiveness of sins through faith in God's Son. But already at the time of John and Jesus' preaching, there were those who rejected this invitation to believe and receive. **The excuses that they gave, instead of trusting in the Messiah Jesus for salvation, are simply a list of their idols. Every person has a god. That in which you trust is truly your god.**

The Pharisees trusted in their own works for salvation. The Sadducees trusted in their position and power. The religious zealots trusted in their commitment to rebel. None of these can receive the invitation because they have another god. They hear Jesus' words, but not really. They consider his words to be misadvised at best and faulty at worst.

The man who speaks up in today's Holy Gospel has completely rejected any supper of free forgiveness. There is no mention of the man's sins. There is no mention of the Messiah's person or work. There is no mention of the Gospel invitation to believe. He remains unrepentant and unbelieving and yet he says, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God." He disregards Jesus, faith, forgiveness, and yet thinking he is saved declares that he is looking forward to feasting in heaven. No wonder Jesus tells him **"...None of those men who were invited shall taste my supper."**

My dear Christian friends, pay careful attention to the story. You and I have been welcomed into the kingdom of God. We are the poor and the crippled, the blind and the lame. We were initially outside of the nation of Israel and yet their rejection of the Messiah has been our invitation. The master said, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled" (Luke 14:23).

St. Paul says in Romans 11:11, "I say then, have they{*the Jews*} stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles." Because of the Jews rejection, we have been invited to believe in the Gospel. **Now God hopes that our acceptance will make them jealous of the grace we have received and then they will accept the invitation, too.** But that topic is for another sermon. Today, we need to make note of the words, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled" (Luke 14:23).

We are those who have been compelled to come in. The word "compelled" sounds so violent. You might think that it involves physical restraints and struggling victims. You may even think that the person is being saved against his will. But the context makes it clear that they have been compelled by the words of the servant who is announcing the message, "Come, for all things are ready."

So why does Jesus say "compel?" There are at least **two things** that need to be overcome. During one of my trips to bring the Word and Sacrament to Chuck and Joyce Mann, I remember talking to some residents about the evacuations of a recent hurricane. They told me how they boarded up the house, and secured supplies and traveled to a secure site. Then they said, "We will never do that again. They play it up big, but it wasn't anything. Next time, we're going to ride it out."

Living in Southern Illinois I don't know much about hurricanes, but when it comes to salvation, the first thing that people need to understand is the destruction caused by sin. Until the Law shows you your sinful condition and lack of righteousness, you will stay put in your works-righteousness or your material existence or your pleasure-seeking. Like the man at the feast, you may even think that you are blessed and will be attending the heavenly feast. **The first thing we need to learn is to seek shelter in the Gospel message of Jesus' forgiveness.**

The second thing that needs to be overcome is the despair of those who have been shown their sin. Many people doubt that God truly wants to save them. They need to be convinced, that is compelled, to eat the great and glorious gospel. Our Triune God is seriously desiring to have you at his table. There is nothing you could have possibly done to turn Him away from you. You will not feel out of place in His kingdom. Everyone, there, is a forgiven sinner. Everyone is holding to the forgiveness of sins and rejoicing in God's love. Even now, He desires to welcome you into His church and adopt you as His son. You will find that for those who believe, their despair is replaced with peace, hope and joy. They are loved by God and they know it. They are blessed to eat bread in the kingdom of God.

The word "compel" has the sense of convincing you that you belong there. It includes showing you your great danger. Apart from Jesus you will not taste the heavenly supper. It includes showing you His great love so that you believe the words of His mouth. God says, "I want you to believe in My Son and be saved. I want you eating the great and glorious gospel in my house forever. Turn from your sins and live."

Whatever idol is keeping you from holding to the announcement of forgiveness, throw it away. Whoever is telling you there is blessedness apart from Jesus is lying to you. **Here in the Divine Service, the teaching of God's Word is Jesus showing you your predicament and giving you the invitation to believe in His Son.** Here you are being compelled to leave your lying idols behind and taste Jesus' supper. Through faith in Christ there is blessedness. All of those who believe will taste Jesus' supper.