Season after
PENTECOST

Collect of the Day

Almighty God, You invite us to trust in You for our salvation. Deal with us not in the severity of Your judgement but by the greatness of Your mercy; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Scripture Readings

Psalm 23 (antiphon v. 5a)
Isaiah 25:6-9
Philippians 4:4-13
Matthew 22:1-14

Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 510
Other Hymns – 733 (OT), 803 (E), 818 (E), 917 (E), 830 (G)

Prayers

In peace and joy let us pray to our Father who art in heaven.

For the peace that passes all understanding, for glad hearts that rejoice in Christ and His gift of forgiveness and salvation, we thank You, heavenly Father.

For the Church, for all ministers of the Church, for missionaries and all church workers, for the agencies of the Church that assist in the mission of witness and service, and for all who support the work of the Kingdom, we thank You, heavenly Father.

For this nation, for our prime minister and parliament, for our premier and all local government personnel, for this rich and bountiful land whereby our physical lives are nourished and sustained, we thank You, heavenly Father.

For the homes in which Your people dwell, for husbands and wives, parents and children, for good friends and faithful neighbours, we thank You, heavenly Father.

For those who are new to the one saving faith, for the teaching and learning of Your divine Word in congregations throughout this nation, and for all that is good and right, noble and godly; we thank You, heavenly Father.

O holy Father, from You and through You and to You are all things and to You alone be all glory and honour now and forever; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. **Amen.**

Season after PENTECOST SERMON

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
(Series A)

Sermon Text: Matthew 22:1-14

"It Sounds Inviting"

For the last two weeks we heard Jesus refer to the kingdom of heaven as a vineyard. This week the picture is of a wedding feast, an image that is quite familiar to most of us. In Jesus' day, as well as our own, a marriage was celebrated with feasting at a reception. Today they tend to go on until about 1:00 a.m. when the bar has to close, but in Jesus' day they sometimes lasted for a week. It was truly a time to celebrate.

The church calendar consists of a number of feast days or festivals for us to celebrate. This week, for instance, is the feast of St. Luke. Our hymnal lists 35 such feast days to be observed. In addition to these are, of course, the major feast days like Christmas, Easter, and the Day of Pentecost. And if that were not enough feasting, every Sunday is a festal celebration of the day our Lord rose from the dead. Today, yes, is a feast day!

And if the kingdom of heaven is like a wedding feast, then we want to be invited. We want to join in the celebration. Everyone should be eager to attend a celebration of this kind, but the fact of the matter is that some people don't accept their invitation to the feast.

Now, in our day of age, wedding invitations are sent only to a select group of people. Moreover, it is necessary that wedding invitations include a way to reply to the invitation because we know that not everyone who is invited will come. There are a number of reasons why people decline invitations to wedding banquets. It may be too far away, or farther than they want to travel. It may be on a day when there is something else that demands your presence. It may be that the time spent away from home or work would make it difficult to recover from a missed day or two.

In the kingdom of heaven, however, everyone is invited to the feast. God wants everyone to celebrate joyously, for all eternity, the victory of His Son, Jesus Christ, over sin, death, and the power of the devil.

God wants all people everywhere to be saved from the punishment of hell, which we all deserve because of our sins. And so, He invites us to eternal life with Him by sharing with us the good news that Jesus died and took the punishment we deserve for our sins upon Himself. Our loving heavenly Father sends that invitation to the feast of salvation to everyone. Through His Word and Spirit He calls everyone to come to Him for rescue, redemption, and rest. The Gospel of Jesus Christ crucified for you and risen from the dead in victory is your invitation to the eternal feast of the kingdom of heaven. How will you reply?

The invited guests in Jesus' parable paid no special attention to their invitation. They went off to their fields and their businesses. The daily matters of this fleeting earthly life were more important to them than the feast of eternal life. It is easy for us to also lose sight of the importance of taking time to come to the feast, to celebrate, to come to the table of the Lord. We often get confused over what is urgent and what is important. The daily matters at home, work, and school seem tremendously urgent, so that, like the invited guests in the parable, we give them priority over what is truly important.

Sometimes, like the others in the parable, we get angry towards those who urge us to the feast. Parents receive less than an enthusiastic response when they rightly point out to their children that confirmation homework needs to be finished before we turn on Netflix. Wives receive a look of annoyance when they remind their husbands that family devotions should come before leaving for sporting events. And if they try to get us out of bed on Sunday morning before we're ready, they had better prepare for a full day of retaliation.

Clearly, the feast is the important thing! The Word of God which tells you that your sins have been forgiven in the blood of Jesus is the important thing. The sacraments which deliver that forgiveness to you are the important thing and well worth setting aside whatever else may be urgent.

Now, God invited His chosen people, the children of Abraham, to join in the celebration of His Son, but they were too busy with their daily lives. They concentrated on how to live rather than on the One who gave His life for them. We can find the same mistake in many religions today, even within some denominations which call themselves Christian. They have rejected the invitation to the feast of grace because they have given priority to their own daily works.

God went to great lengths to prepare this feast. It cost Him dearly. He will not let it go to waste. And so, He continues to invite everyone and sends His Word out to compel all of us to come to His feast of forgiveness. He wants to share His forgiving love and is willing to do so with anyone, good or bad, no matter what you have done in your past; no matter what secrets may be hidden in your heart; no matter how often you have neglected the importance of this feast and chosen what seemed urgent instead.

Yes, God has invited you to come and taste His forgiveness. Taste the body and blood of the Son who gave His life for your sins. Taste the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ whose gifts are the medicine of the soul. Taste the "*feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines*," prepared on the mountain of Calvary where Christ gave His all, body and blood, to atone for the sins of the world.

Jesus ends this parable in an unusual fashion. Everything seemed fine when the wedding hall was filled with guests, but then the king came in and found someone not dressed in wedding clothes. That man was taken outside and his fate was no better than those who rejected their invitation in the first place. Now, Jesus does not include this part of the parable to scare us into thinking God will throw us out of His kingdom if we don't wear the right clothes. Rather, this is another warning to those who, although they may accept the invitation and come to the banquet, don't join in the celebration.

It's like those churches which call themselves Christian, but focus on how we are to live rather than on the One who gave His life for them. These are the guests who come without wearing wedding clothes. They come to the feast but they have no intention of joining in the celebration of Christ's work and His victory over sin, death, and the devil. Instead they celebrate their own so-called good works and how well they have lived their life. They may have Christ as their example, but not as their Saviour. They are at the feast for the wrong reason and that is no better than declining the invitation.

At the feast of the Lord we dare not come to draw attention to ourselves, our works, our dress, or for any reason other than to eat. The feast is to celebrate a victory we cannot win, to enjoy the work that someone else has done for us, to focus on the One who has given His all to have us for His own. Wear the wedding clothes He Himself offers you—the "garments of salvation" and the "robe of righteousness" which He graciously provides (Isaiah 61:10). Feast on His Word of salvation. Gratefully receive the gifts He lavishes upon us.

The wedding feast to which we have been invited has been thoroughly prepared. The only-begotten Son of God has been sacrificed even for our sins of neglecting His gift of salvation. The table of the Lord is set and His supper awaits all who, with repentant hearts, are prepared to have His gracious love bestowed upon them. And at this supper we join with all who have gone on before and all who will follow after us to the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end – come to be fed and to celebrate the One who has given everything to wed Himself to His people. So we sing in the hymn:

"Lord Jesus Christ, You have prepared
This feast for our salvation;
It is Your body and Your blood,
And at Your invitation,

As weary souls, with sin oppressed,
We come to You for needed rest,
For comfort, and for pardon." Amen.