

Second Sunday after Trinity 2024
Luke 14:15-24 (ESV)

“Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, “Go out quickly...and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame...Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in.”

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Do you enjoy surprises, dear ones? Do you find it thrilling to experience a sudden turn of events, or when things happen that you don't expect?

One of my most vivid memories as a little boy was seeing lots of presents wrapped up and set out in our living room for Christmas one winter. I was filled wonder and anticipation thinking about opening the gifts the next day. But I was soon filled with horror when I awoke to discover that overnight all the gifts that were addressed to me just the night before had new tags put on them, and now they were all addressed to a particularly mischievous uncle of mine. And the prospect of not sharing in the joy of opening gifts left me deeply saddened and uninterested in the spread of food laid out on the kitchen table in celebration of Christmas.

Dear ones, surprises, as you know, can easily provoke powerful responses from us. And as it happens, our Gospel text is full of surprises. And that's because our Gospel text is about those gathered together at the appointed time to feast with the Christ in the kingdom of God—a kingdom which doesn't operate according to worldly standards and worldly wisdom, nor does Christ Himself. So how do you respond when you're confronted with what He says and what He does?

Because the truth is that for all who would celebrate the feast with Him and forever enjoy the gifts of God, a great surprise awaits us all.

Our text picks up one Sabbath day late in Jesus' ministry. Already He's set His face to go to Jerusalem, but our Lord nevertheless decides to dine with a number of the Pharisees. And they're all watching Him carefully, every one, hoping to trap Him, hoping to put Him to open shame. But to their surprise, Jesus shames them at every turn.

Our Lord heals a man on the Sabbath and shows them how diseased their theology of keeping the Sabbath really is. So too, Jesus tells them—and in truth, all of us—not to clamor for the seat of honor as worldly people do, but rather, in faith, to be humble and lowly so that we'll be exalted—not by men, but by God. And finally, Jesus explains that the blessing of God will not rest upon us when we simply invite friends and relatives and rich neighbors to feast with us because we know *they* will repay us. No, but it's by inviting the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind instead—those considered unworthy and unclean, the outcasts—dear ones, we're blessed by giving a feast for those who *can't* repay us, because *God Himself will* in the day of the resurrection.

Jesus' beautiful teaching leaves the Pharisees so shocked, so stunned and bewildered that one of them, it seems, is thoroughly provoked to rage; as if he had no control over himself, and he says before the whole crowd, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!”--the point being they didn't think He would be included *with them* while they feasted in the kingdom of God.

You must remember, the Pharisees held that only those striving strenuously, meticulously to keep the Torah, only those who are outwardly pure and unblemished according to the Law of Moses would feast with the Messiah in God's kingdom. And as far as most of the Pharisees were concerned, Jesus was a fraud; He didn't keep the Sabbath like they did; He didn't shy away from the sickly or the blind, but gladly received them and even tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners into His company—and most Pharisees hated Him for it. They wanted nothing to do with Him or anything He offered.

Hence, our Lord's parable where He flips everything on its head, and those esteemed guests who were invited to the banquet feast in the kingdom of God end up despising the very Messiah promised them. And to *everyone's* surprise, our Lord shows us that in the end, it is the Pharisees and everyone like them who will refuse to feast with *Jesus* and those *like Him* in the kingdom of God.

In our Lord's parable, a wealthy patron giving a feast has already had his guests RSVP and the food had been prepared, but one by one, the guests begin to give excuses and won't come. And here, you may be surprised to know that far from being reasonable and polite, these guests and their excuses are simply outrageous—they're absurd! These people publicly deliver biting insults to the generous patron giving the feast.

The one man says he just bought a field and is going to examine it. But in the middle east certainly, no one would buy *any* farm land until you knew every square inch of it like the back of your hand—what's the quality of the soil? How much rainfall is there during the growing season? How much sunlight does it get? It's a process that can take years in that part of the world.

So using this as an excuse is like telling the head of your family who's prepared a great Christmas brunch for your family to enjoy and has personally crafted a very costly and intricate gift for you—it's like telling him you won't be there to receive these things because last night you bought a house you've never seen before and you're going to look at it and see what part of town it's in. Can you imagine? How would you respond?

The second man's excuse is similar: he bought five oxen and needs to go test them. But in that culture, you'd never buy oxen without testing them. That would be like buying five cars all at once without knowing if they had engines in them!

And the third man doesn't even ask to be excused. He just says he'll be enjoying the intimate pleasures of married life, which were more important than coming to the feast. And I fear for anyone who would be so brazen as to say this to their neighbor after being invited over for a meal—to say nothing of responding like this to our Lord.

So, what does the generous patron do, dear ones, when all his invited guests show their hatred for him publicly? Maybe you know how you'd respond, but how will he? Will he sue them for defamation? Will he insult them publicly in return?

No! He responds by inviting those who, of themselves, would never be worthy to feast with him—the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind—and even foreigners, strangers passing by on the road outside the city. And that's us, by the way. We're Gentiles, who were once strangers to the commonwealth of Israel. But He would nonetheless have all of you come and join Him at this table to feast with Him in the kingdom of God.

But my question to you now is: how do you respond knowing not only that you must eat and drink with outcasts and sinners, with the poor and sickly and the strangers, but that you must also count yourselves among their number and become one of them yourself.

Because whether we're wealthy or not, only the poor in spirit will see the kingdom of heaven.

But Christ our Lord laid aside His great riches and became poor for our sake, that we would be unfathomably rich in the Holy Spirit and have our treasure laid up for us in heaven with all the baptized sons of God.

And so too, whether we're physically blind or not, all of us have difficulty seeing just how desperately we need to be saved from our sins and what unimaginable torment awaits those who aren't.

But Christ our Lord receives the blind and opens their eyes, and He's opened your eyes to see the unimaginable love He's shown us by His death on the cross for us, to take away our sin.

And finally, whether or not we're crippled and lame, none of us are able to overcome death. But Christ is and He has, and, by the hands of His servants today, He will give over the very food and drink which grants eternal life—truly, a feast that transcends all others.

So come, then. Heed your Lord's call and feast yourselves today, dear ones. Respond to our Lord's words in humble faith, and you will taste our Lord's feast in His kingdom, to Whom be all the glory now and forever. Amen.