

Sunday, August 15, 2017  
 Lectionary 28  
 19th Sunday after Pentecost

**Count Me In**

Isaiah 25:1-9; Psalm 23; Philippians 4:1-9; Matthew 22:1-14

*Delivered to St. Stephen's Lutheran Church*

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Well, I am curious about how many of you were expecting a stewardship sermon after receiving your letters and invitation to lunch today, but after this reading are probably hoping to God that I do not have a stewardship sermon prepared for you. Because how easy would it be for me to say the end of today's gospel simply speaks to each and everyone of us. If you don't arrive to church with your pledge card in hand we will take notice bind you and throw you into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

(wait for the laughter - the uncomfortable laughter)

But if you bare with me we will make it through and figure out why this gospel has such a peculiar ending.

If you recall we are in a series of parables and allegories that are being taught to those challenging Jesus' authority. One final time Jesus speaks to his opponents and this time uses this image of the wedding banquet.

How many of us like going to wedding banquets?

There's usually food and open bar and a lot of celebration, it is supposed to be a time of great joy...but you have to be on the guest list or at the very least have an invitation.

Jesus once again uses a position of authority to represent God, that is the position of the king who is inviting people to come to his son's wedding banquet. The King sends out his slaves...he sends out his workers to go and call all those that were invited to the banquet. Come, sit at the table, come, be part of the celebration.

Perhaps your suspicions about a Stewardship sermon were correct, because when we talk about stewardship and the church, and how each and everyone of us could be counted in as part of the story that is happening and unfolding here on the corner of 13th and Broom Streets we can talk about a banquet.

Imagine this if you close your eyes for a moment...

A table set before each and everyone of us...where we are all invited to be counted in as part of this unfolding of a larger story of how God is working in...and around...and through each and everyone of us so that we may go out and touch a world that needs the healing...the love...and the compassion of a God that can send somebody like Jesus Christ to not just teach us...but to live with us...to die with us...and then to promise us a gift of eternal salvation.

Count me in.

I mean...this is a God that Isaiah tells us has no place for ruthlessness or for strong people that come in and abuse the weak and the poor.

This is a God that will not stand for somebody to sit on a throne or in a position of power over any nation and then subsequently abuse the people that they are entrusted to protect.

For the God of Jesus Christ...the God that Isaiah tells us will bring the Messiah...is a God where all people will glorify. A God where the arrogant are crushed and the meek and disenfranchised inherit the wonders of the earth and see eternal life.

This is a God that has been a refuge for the poor... a god that is been a refuge for the needy...for the distressed...a shelter for those who are weathering the darkest storms in their life.

This is a God who opens its arms to the people that desperately need to be embraced by something or someone that can love them when even they cannot love themselves.

This is a God that takes no pleasure in ruthlessness but a God that takes pleasure in compassion, and love...this is a God that takes pleasure in the Gentleness and mercy.

Make no mistake, the God that invites you to the wedding banquet, that set a table before you even in the presence of your enemies...as the Psalmist tells us...where your head is anointed and even your cup overflows.... this is a God this is able to swallow up death forever...a God that wipes away tears of sadness and fear from faces and this God will not disgrace but will bless you with grace and mercy and that grace and mercy is found in the words and the teachings and the and the life and the death of God's only son Jesus Christ.

Count me in please.....

Please mercifully Count me in.

I need a lord that will let me lie down in green pastures and lead me beside still waters when the storms of life are too much for me to bear.

I need a Lord that could restore my soul and for the sake of God send me along a path of righteousness so that even when I face death straight in the face will not have a single fear because clutching my hand is my Lord.

This is where stewardship comes from.

In the beginning, the very beginning when God created everything God told us that we are to take charge and be stewards of all the blessings, Of all the privileges, and of all things given to us.

The very definition of stewardship is the conducting, supervising, or managing of something...most especially the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care.

This is how Merriam Webster defines stewardship.

The careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care.

Careful - responsible...

Words that we forget apply to the way in which we do things...especially in the ways in which we fulfill this mandate of God to be good stewards of God's gifts.

The gift of creation...the planet...we are, by the very definition of people of God...required to be good stewards of our planet. We need to take special care and be responsible for the use and understand when to stop the misuse of our beautiful home.

The gift of Wilmington and St. Stephen's...yes this place, in all its beauty and also in all its trouble is a gift from God. The walls that were built generations ago by a people that had a hope for a better more Christ filled future are calling to us to continue this mission as we join them in this ever growing story of this place.

Our city and state are also given to us for careful and responsible management...how do you live? How do you take part? These questions are not just questions about citizenship that we are taught in Civics, but questions of how we see ourselves as part of God's work in the place in which we live.

Each other - look at the faces of people around this room. Gifts of God - the face of Christ in every person. Careful and responsible management of this place and each other not only calls us to care for those here...but to ask the question:

Who is missing?

Who can you invite to join you in the mission of the church - to sit in the pews - to work in the pantry? Who is missing and how will you begin to invite others into this wonderful and holy work we do?

And finally, you. You are a gift of God's that requires careful and responsible management.

How do you carefully manage yourself?

Your health...your free time (remember God still asks for us to have sabbaths - both in church and in personal times of rest...your volunteer time...your finances...how do you care for yourself?

Do you treat yourself as a Holy gift from God?

Because you should...and when you do...it makes loving your neighbor so much easier.

You realize that God cares for you...I hope...and that God actually cares about all people.

Paul talks about clothing ourselves in Christ...to put Christ on like a garment. And believe me, that is what God intends...for us to wrap ourselves in the gift of Jesus Christ's grace and mercy.

The peculiar parable we heard...has just as gentle and kind of a king. Even the poor and the bad were invited to the wedding banquet. In his time, those that had nothing were supplied the required wedding robe.

Like now, when we feel we are empty and facing that shadow of death...God gives us the cloak of Christ to wear. Because we know that without Christ none of this is possible.

That kind king in our strange little story became mad at the improperly dressed wedding guest...because it was as if he was telling God that he does not need Christ. He does not need God.

That he can handle things without the grace and love and mercy of Jesus Christ.

The king became angry because that is not just prideful ignorance...it is a false truth that lies in something more sinister...it lies in a belief that we can control and live without the mercy of God.

Good stewards...careful managers...need God.

This church needs you.

How will you be counted in?