

Supper's Ready!

Year A, Proper 23 – Matthew 22:9-14

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, October 12, 2014

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

For the last few weeks, the gospel lessons have been focusing on Jesus' parables about the nature of the kingdom of heaven. We've heard it compared to a man hiring day laborers, to a king forgiving the debts of his slave, to two sons, one of whom obeyed and one who did not. Just last week, our gospel talked about the kingdom of heaven as God's vineyard. And today Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a king giving a wedding feast.

This timing is marvelous! In a just a few days now, Jenny and I will be celebrating our own wedding anniversary. Thirty-one years ago in Clarksville, Tennessee, Jenny and I were up to *here* in joyful preparations. We had arranged for musicians. The church was filled nearly to overflowing with flowers. As a young Army lieutenant, I had purchased a new mess dress uniform and Jenny had found the most beautiful collection of lace and satin ever assembled. We had practiced our lines until I personally could hear mine in my sleep. We were ready.

We were looking forward to sharing our happiness with all our friends. All of Jenny's childhood and college and church friends were to be in attendance. The entire choir of the Madison Street United Methodist Church was planning to be at the wedding of their favorite "cute couple." Relatives were coming from as far away as Phoenix, Arizona. And most of Charlie Company, 326th Medical Company was thrilled at the opportunity to meet the woman who had managed to mellow out their raving lunatic of an Executive Officer. Of the hundred and fifty invitations we had sent out, we had received only a couple of regrets. We were ready.

We planned a grand reception for all our friends. Now mind you, we were on a limited budget, what with the flowers, and all. We had not put together a wedding feast, *per se*. But we had the punch and the nuts and the mints. And we had – the cake. The pinnacle. The *piece-de-resistance*. The ultimate preparation. Paradise – made from sugar, flour and eggs. Little white decorations as far as the eye could see, topped off with the second best looking couple we knew. It was four tiers of manna, straight from heaven. Well, actually, it was from Red's Bakery that *used* to be down on Riverside Drive – but it *was* magnificent! And we were ready!

Finally, the 22nd arrived. Our wonderful, beautiful, expectant day. No doubt about it, we were ready. But the guests? They stayed away in droves!

Uncle Bob and Aunt Mary were late getting in from Ohio – something about traffic in Cincinnati. My unit, less me, thank God, was detained on an extended exercise on Fort Campbell's back forty. And the biggest storm system to hit Clarksville in three years moved in on the very eve of our wedding and took up semi-permanent residence.

In spite of all that, we had a wonderful time. Most of the little munchies got consumed by those that *did* attend. But the cake! That towering triumph of the baker's art – the cake more or less just sat there. Oh sure, we gave double portions to everyone. But that barely touched the rim of the bottom layer. The rest of it stood there on the table, mocking us in sticky, sugary silence.

So... we gave it away! The children of Madison Street United Methodist Church left Sunday School the day after Rich and Jenny's wedding with enough pure refined sucrose in their tiny little systems to cause their parents fits for days. Part of the cake helped sustain my sister and my best man on

their road-trip back to Arizona. And one entire layer was sent by military courier, under strict orders from a well-known raving lunatic of a lieutenant, to supplement the field rations of my comrades out on the back forty. Come high water or readiness for national security, Jenny and I were intent on having others share in the joy of our special day, and we were *not* going to let that cake go uneaten. We were ready, and we were *not* about to let all our preparations go to waste.

The banquet thrown by the king in Jesus's story was a *considerably* bigger deal than Jenny and my little reception. We're talking about the *prince's* wedding here. A national holiday. This would have been the hottest party of the social season. But Jesus tells us that those invited to the banquet were, for whatever reason, less than enthusiastic about attending. Some just ignored the invitation. Others had other things to do, crops to take in, money to count. Still others, Jesus said, got *really* ugly. The upshot is that the ones who ended up *enjoying* the King's great feast, were those that had absolutely no claim to it.

The story in this morning's Gospel, of course, goes on from there, but you no doubt noticed that I exercised the celebrant's prerogative to shorten the reading. I noticed you noticing. The rest of the story will just have to wait for another time, because right now, I want to focus on the king's preparations.

We all know, of course, that the story is about more than a king's wasted food. It's about the King's preparations and our lack of appetite. In the beginning, it was called "Eden," an entire world created for humankind – but we decided that we'd rather eat elsewhere. Again and again, the King has called us to the banquet he has prepared. And again and again, we have found other places to be, other people to see, other things to do. Again and again, we have let things call us away or get in the way. Until finally, God himself, God *himself became* the invitation. Setting aside the glories of his Kingdom, he came to *us*, to show us the way, to pay the cost, once and for all, to dress us all in the glory of his resurrection. All we have to do is accept the invitation. All we have to do is come.

There's the problem, isn't it? Because it is at *precisely* that point where things get complicated. Oh sure, sitting here in church, we know full well that we're not the really nasty and rotten ones from there at the end Jesus's parable. *We* had nothing to do with killing the King's messengers, *did* we? But how many of us, I wonder, can identify with those *other* fellas, the ones that had to get back to their farms or their businesses? How many times have we had other things to do? Other places to be? Other matters to attend to, rather than attending to the business for which we were created? How often do we let traffic in Cincinnati, or a rain storm, or even really important work, keep us from sitting down at the King's banquet.

And, to take it one step further, among those of us who have partaken of this rich fare for years, how many of us take the time to remind our friends and our family of how wonderful and satisfying and *free* that banquet is? How willing are we to freely share our time and our energy and our resources to tell others about the feast? How many of us, when we see people around us hungering, *starving* for the kind of sustenance that we ourselves have received from this banquet, reach out to bring *them* to the table, to make sure they have at least a slice, some small morsel, of that ultimate goodness?

The preparations for the King's great feast are completed. The banquet has been laid out. The oxen and the fatted calf and the four-tier wedding cake have been spread before you. It's time to come. It's time to *eat*. Supper's *ready*.

Supper's ready. It's been ready for a long, long time, just waiting for *you* to come. Put down your plow. Put down your tally sheets. Put down your cell-phones and your tablets and your keyboards.

Supper's ready! The *table* has been set. The bread and the wine have been prepared. The body and blood of Jesus Christ have been broken and poured out. The banquet of the King of Heaven is yours for the taking.

Supper's ready! Leave behind your bitterness. Leave behind your anger. Leave behind your resentment. Leave behind your mistrust. Leave behind your fears and your prejudices and your conceits. Put down *whatever* is keeping you from being at God's table with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your and soul!

Supper's ready! Taste and see, that the Lord is good!