

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYERⁱ

The Second Sunday after Trinity

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest-in-Charge

The Lessons:ⁱⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the eighth Verse of the fourth Chapter of the Second Book of the Kings, commonly called the Fourth Book of the Kings.ⁱⁱⁱ

“And it fell on a day, that Elisha [**ee-LYE-shuh**] passed to Shunem [**SHOE-nemm**], where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither. And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there. And he said to Gehazi [**ghih-HAZE-eye**] his servant, Call this Shunammite [**SHOE-nemm-ight**]. And when he had called her, she stood before him. And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people. And he said, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi [**ghih-HAZE-eye**] answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old. And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door. And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid. And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha [**ee-LYE-shuh**] had said unto her, according to the time of life.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Verse of the fourteenth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke.^{iv}

“Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

“And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and shewed [SHOWD] his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “And yet there is room.”^v In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

When as a young man I first read today’s Second Lesson, I immediately applied it to all the people who were not in church because they had other things to do that they thought were more important.

That's one application, and a valid one, I think, but, of course there's no point in preaching that sermon to those of you who are here. So I decided to look at the parable in its historical context and then see how it might apply to us.

There is a narrow historical context and a broader one as well. The narrow one has to do with the prevailing social customs of the time in the Middle East.

We are used to receiving invitations that specify a date a time and a place. In the ancient Middle East the invitation would specify only the date. The place would be at the home of the host, and everyone in the village knew where that was. The time would be determined by how long it took to prepare the meal that day. There were no supermarkets, so the animals would have to be butchered, the fruit would have to be gathered, the bread would have to be baked, and all that with no microwave, no clock or kitchen timer, and only wood fires for cooking and baking.

The guests would be expected to remain home until a messenger came and told them that dinner was ready. They would then be expected to come, properly dressed and ready to be received by their host.

The guests in the parable insulted their host by offering obviously lame excuses after they had already agreed to attend. One said he had just bought a piece of property and had to go look at it. Like you don't look at a property before you buy it? The same thing with the man who said he had bought six yoke of oxen before he found out how good they were. And, of course you don't just up and get married and start your honeymoon on the day you've agreed to attend a formal dinner.

It was obvious that the guests had conspired to boycott the dinner and allow all the expensive preparations to go to waste. So the host was justifiably angry. That's the immediate historical context of the story. But there is a broader context that I believe will yield some insights for us to consider.

In the book of Isaiah we read the following:

“On this mountain the Lord of Hosts will make for all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined. And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all people, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people from all the earth. For the Lord has spoken.”

As Christians, we take this prophecy to refer to what we call “the marriage feast of the Lamb,” the day when Christ returns to earth to claim the Church as His bride and take us to Himself. The Sacrament we celebrate today is a foretaste of that banquet.

The Jews of Jesus’ day understood Isaiah’s prophecy in a slightly different way. They anticipated a great banquet on the day that the Messiah would come to vindicate the righteous Jews, compensate them for their suffering, and destroy their enemies. The Messianic age would be ushered in by a great banquet to which all Jews, or at least those who were righteous, would be summoned.

In that broader context we can see that the story of this parable is really the story of Jesus and the Church.

In both Matthew and Luke, Jesus sends His disciples to announce the dawning of the Messianic age, which He called the Kingdom of God. He instructed them to go only to the homes of Jews. They were not to go to Gentile towns because God had chosen the Jews as His special people and they were to have the privilege of being the first ones to hear the news that the time had come and the prophecies were being fulfilled. St. Paul also observed the privilege of the Jewish people by going first to the synagogue every time he entered a city and preaching to the congregation there. It was only when they rejected his message that he turned and proclaimed the gospel to the Gentiles.

But instead of responding to the summons, the leaders and the well-to-do, the “respectable” people of Jerusalem, showed no respect for the Lord’s messengers, scoffed at the invitation, and conspired against Jesus and the whole enterprise. If we don’t come, they figured, this movement will die. At that point, Jesus could have gotten very angry,

and the Father who sent Him could have sent fire from heaven to destroy the cities of those who would not respond the Apostolic invitation. You may recall that on one occasion, James and John wanted to do just that.

But, instead of striking back at those who had conspired against him, the host in the parable simply turned to people who would be more appreciative of his generosity and the effort that he had expended. That's what Jesus did also. He told the Apostles to shake the dust off their feet (because they had been refused the customary hospitality of having them washed) and move on. He Himself ministered among the poor and the homeless, the beggars and the outcasts who responded to Him gladly.

Jesus Himself is not the host of the Messianic Banquet. The Host is the Father who began long ago to prepare the great banquet in honor of His Son at the end of the age. So when the servant in the parable says, "I have done as you asked and yet there is room," he is revealing that the resources and the generosity of God cannot be exhausted no matter how many people avail themselves of them. As the Psalmist says, "Thy mercies are new every morning."

And that leads me to my final point. As I look out on this congregation, I see that there are more people in the pews than there were when we first occupied this building. But yet there is room. God's house is not yet full, and it should be. God welcomes everyone, regardless of ethnicity, or station in life, to partake of His generosity, His mercy, His kindness, His inexhaustible riches, and He wants His house to be full.

The phrase "compel them to come in" was used by the Inquisition to justify its methods of forced conversions. I know that God does not want that. But He does realize, and I realize, that some people require a substantial amount of persuasion to get them to respond to His gracious invitation. So we, his messengers, have to be persistent.

Talk to people. Listen to their problems and their stories. You might be surprised at what is keeping them away.

Invite them to your home to read the Bible together and to pray together. Invite them to church and offer to pick them up. Follow up with a phone call. Don't be put off by lame excuses or even valid ones. Make a deal to do something that they want to do if they will arrange to come to church with you.

Conclusion:

Here in God's house there is food for every soul. Do you remember what Jesus said after He had miraculously fed five thousand people? He said, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing may be lost."

God hates to see anything go to waste, much less the gift of salvation and the blessings He has prepared for His people. This is God's house, and He wants it to be full. And yet there is room.

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St. David's Anglican Catholic Church
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ⁱ "Any set of Psalms and Lessons appointed for the evening of any day may be read at the morning service, and any set of morning Psalms and Lessons may be read in the evening." Concerning the Service of the Church, *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

ⁱⁱ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* xxvii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

ⁱⁱⁱ *II Kings* 4:8-17 (KJV).

^{iv} *St. Luke* 14:12-24 (KJV).

^v *St. Luke* 14:22b (KJV).