

Third Sunday after Pentecost; June 11, 18, 25  
+ Luke 14:15-24 +  
"God Keeps Calling"

**When one of those at the table with him heard these things, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the one who will feast in the kingdom of God!"**

**Jesus said to him "A certain man made a great banquet and invited many people. When it was time for the banquet, he sent out his servant to tell those who were invited, 'Come, because everything is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses.**

**"The first told him, 'I bought a field, and I need to go and see it. I ask you to excuse me.'**

**"Another one said, 'I bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out. I ask you to excuse me.'**

**"Still another said, 'I just got married, and so I am unable to attend.'**

**"The servant arrived and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house was angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town, and bring in here the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.'**

**"The servant said, 'Master, what you have commanded has been done, and there is still room.'**

**"Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and urge them to come in, so that my house may be filled. Yes, I tell you that none of those men who were invited will taste my banquet.'"**

When was the last time you attended a party that really wasn't much of a party? It is awkward, and can make you feel sorry for the host, when a carefully planned get-together fizzles because most of those who were invited just don't get together. Even more awkward and sorry than attending an event like that is hosting one! Have you ever done that before? When only a few people come to your party, you almost wish no one had at all. At least that way you wouldn't feel so embarrassed!

Probably we've all been there, either as host or guest.

God is hosting a party. More exactly, it's a banquet in heaven. And here is what God wants in terms of attendance at the heavenly banquet: **"...so that my house may be filled."** God wants his heavenly banquet jammed with revelers. And it will be. Not because everyone who is invited comes! As we'll see, most turn down God's invitation to the banquet. But God keeps calling, until his house is full for his banquet.

As Jesus speaks this parable, he is the guest in the home of a Pharisee. There are other guests there, too. Most of the people who have accepted the invitation to dine at the Pharisee's house are rejecting God's invitation to dine in heaven. That's why Jesus tells them this parable: to warn them. And there's a part of us that needs the warning, too.

The master in Jesus' story prepares his banquet. This is good news! God has prepared the banquet of heaven for all who believe. He has done this by sending his Son Jesus from heaven into our world. Because in order to get into heaven, you have to be perfect in God's eyes. And we are not. We are sinful from the moment we come to life and keep sinning every day. But God is holy, and he will not have sin anywhere in

his heavenly home. So, he sent Jesus to be perfect for us. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit's work, so he was born without sin. Jesus kept all of God's commandments to the letter in everything he thought, said, and did. Through faith in Jesus, we now have the holiness that we need to get into heaven.

But that wasn't all Jesus did for us! He also died on the cross to take our sins away. With our sins paid for and Jesus' righteousness draped over our shoulders, we are ready to enter the banquet hall of heaven. And we are headed for a banquet that will never end. Jesus rose and lives and will live forever, and so will we. When we reach heaven, we'll reach a celebration that will not end.

It is through faith in Jesus that our sin is gone and perfection is ours. Faith in Jesus accepts the invitation to celebrate forever in heaven. And thank God, he has given faith in Jesus to us. By the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, we have accepted the invitation to the banquet of heaven.

Sadly, not everyone does. Including the men who originally hear Jesus tell this story. They are like the three invitees who turned down the master's invitation. Most people in Israel fell into that category: God was inviting them, and he was inviting them first. They were his chosen nation, the people to whom God sent his Son first. He held out the invitation to them first, and by and large they rejected it with unbelief.

The three men in the story reject the master's invitation for different reasons. Some reasons seem better than others, and some are ridiculous. Take for example the excuse of the man who just got married. That seems like a pretty decent reason to skip a banquet, right? But then you have the guy who says, "I just bought a field, and need to go check it out." What? You didn't look at it before you bought it? And if you did buy it sight unseen, that field isn't going anywhere! It will probably still be there after the banquet, and you can check it out then!

And this is how it is when people reject the invitation to heaven by disbelieving Jesus' gospel. They do it for all sorts of reasons. Recently on the way to church on a Sunday morning, I was listening to a prominent local preacher on the radio. He was talking about this exact thing, and he said he thinks it's mostly pride. People hear the invitation to heaven and think, "I'm a good person. I don't need Jesus to get into heaven." That preacher chalks it up to pride, and I don't disagree. But there are other reasons, too. Some people just don't believe in heaven at all. Or like these three guys in Jesus' story, they're so wrapped up in the matters of this world that they're not at all interested in attending a heavenly banquet.

But the bottom line is that rejection of the invitation to heaven, for whatever reason, is still rejection. Consider: a guy asks a young lady on a date. She answers: "I wouldn't go on a date with you if you were the last man on earth. You're ugly, your breath stinks, and you have the personality of a rock. Get away from me and never talk to me again, you Shrek-looking weirdo!" Well, that stings. So he waits a while, and then asks another young lady out. Her answer: "My! That's so kind of you to ask me! And you're such a nice guy! But I'm just not interested right now." The second young lady was much more polite. But the bottom line is that the poor guy didn't get a date with either girl. No matter the reason behind it, no matter if it's polite or rude, rejection of Jesus' saving work is still rejection.

And as the master makes clear in Jesus' story, he does not at all take kindly to rejection. In the end he says: **"Yes, I tell you that none of those [first three] men who were invited will taste my banquet."** But the master of this house refuses to give up. He is determined to fill his house for the banquet. And that is very good news for people like you and me!

**“Then the master of the house was angry and said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town, and bring in here the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’”** When people reject the invitation to heaven – as the people of Israel were by and large doing even as Jesus was working to open up heaven to them – God keeps calling and inviting. He keeps sending out messengers with the good news of Jesus. Through that gospel, he keeps calling people to faith in Jesus and to the banquet of heaven.

And he doesn’t stop until his banquet is full. For two thousand years since Jesus told this parable, the Father has kept calling and inviting with Jesus’ gospel. Because he kept on calling, here we are two thousand years later on the other side of the world believing in Jesus and headed for the banquet hall of heaven.

We are **“the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.”** God has not called us because we’re attractive or good people. He calls us in spite of the fact that we are unappealing and sinful people. In his grace, he makes us worthy to enter heaven for Jesus’ sake.

He is still calling, and will keep calling to the end, when his house is filled: **“Go out into the highways and hedges, and urge them to come in, so that my house may be filled.”** As believers in Jesus, we take great joy away from this parable. We rejoice in the wonderfully stubborn heart of God, who does not give up calling, who has called us to faith and will welcome us into heaven.

Besides taking joy from Jesus’ story, we should also take a warning and an encouragement. The warning: God does not appreciate rejection of his invitation. It makes him angry. You and I do believe in Jesus, and we are on our way to the banquet of heaven. But whenever God calls to us with the love our Savior, we need to listen and believe and not resist the Holy Spirit. Of course we do not reject the invitation outright as unbelievers do, but as long as there is sin in us – and there will be until we reach the banquet – we sometimes respond to the good news of Jesus with a yawn, with divided attention, or with apathy.

That’s both wrong and dangerous. Resisting the gospel eventually grows into outright rejection, as it has for many who once believed but do no longer. Scripture is full of warnings about this, and we should not be so arrogant to think that it could never happen to us. When Christ’s saving work is preached, listen. When it is taught, learn it. Read it on your own, with your children, and with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus’ perfect life – lived in your place – his death on the cross – that you deserved – that is God’s engraved invitation to the banquet. Pay attention to it and take it to heart.

And here is an encouragement. God is still calling people with the gospel. In the parable the master sends out messengers; he does not go out personally and invite people to the banquet. There still is room in the banquet, so extend the invitation until the house is full. And here’s the beautiful part: when you extend the invitation, you will also be hearing it again yourself and your faith will grow.

For two thousand years since Jesus told this parable, messengers have been going out with the invitation. Some of them have been called to do it as missionaries and pastors and teachers. But every Christian parent is called to teach Jesus to their children. Every Christian friend is called to confess Christ’s salvation to her friends. Every Christian is called to sing it, write it, and speak it.

I am sure at times it may seem like the one encouragement you get in just about every sermon is to use the gospel and proclaim it to others. But there is a reason you hear it so often: it is an encouragement that the Spirit himself gives so many times and in so many ways in the Word. And why? Because there is only

one heavenly banquet; there is only Way in, and that is through faith in our Savior; there is only one gospel message that invites sinners in; and it's that same gospel message that God uses to create faith in Jesus and accept the invitation.

Just like in Jesus' story, some reject it and some, by the Spirit's power, believe and accept it. But all God's people are messengers to invite all those around them in the world to enter the heavenly banquet, sins forgiven and righteousness received through faith in Jesus. Amen.