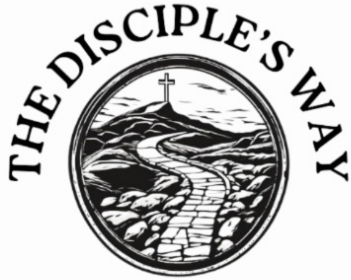




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Christian Formation
at Christ Church Cathedral

Week of June 10, 2024

MONDAY, June 10, 2024 - Isaiah 25:6-9

Isaiah's picture: God's rich feast of salvation

As Israel's story began, God promised Abraham, "All the families of the earth will be blessed because of you" (Genesis 12:3). The prophet Isaiah said when God was victorious, he would prepare "a rich feast"—that was how rulers marked victories. The great food and drink were just a symbolic appetizer. God promised to "swallow up death forever," and "wipe tears from every face." And God's banquet would be for "all peoples," "all nations," "the whole earth."

- By Jesus' day, Israel's religious leaders loved the image of God's great banquet. Many were sure they would be the honored guests. They'd missed a crucial part of the vision. "In one of many expansive visions in Isaiah, God is imagined preparing a banquet not just for the elders on Mount Sinai (cf. Exodus 24), nor even for Judah, but for all the nations." * What tempts you to limit your vision of God's "banquet" to just your own church, nation, or ethnic group? How does your heart respond to God's expansive vision?
- In *The Return of the King* (volume 3 of *The Lord of the Rings*), J.R.R. Tolkien imagined Sam Gamgee awaking after a last-minute rescue from the fires of Mount Doom. Seeing the faces of others he loved and thought he had lost, Sam exclaimed, "Is everything sad going to come untrue?" Yes, Sam, that's the promise—"The LORD God will wipe tears from every face." Which life experiences make that promise particularly meaningful to you?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, the day your victory over death and evil becomes complete will be the ultimate "red letter" day. Keep reminding me that, through your death and resurrection, you already assured that victory. Amen.

* Patricia K. Tull, study note on Isaiah 25:6-10a in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 1129 OT.

TUESDAY, June 11, 2024 - Matthew 21:45-22:6

Religious leaders ignoring God's invitation

Just before this passage, on the Monday before his crucifixion, Jesus told a story about tenant farmers who killed the vineyard owner's son (cf. Matthew 21:33-44). In this reading, he switched the image to a wedding party—but the underlying message was the same. Here invited guests were not just refusing to attend a feast, but abusing and killing the servants sent to tell them the party was ready to start.

- In Jesus' day, and still today, some people respond to God's kingdom invitation not just with indifference, but with active hostility. Perhaps you felt that at some point in your life, or have been on the receiving end of it. What fears or frustrations trigger the hostility, do you think? What makes some people see an invitation to God's party as a bad thing?
- The chief priests and the Pharisees had made up their minds about Jesus. But Matthew said, "They feared the crowds, who thought he was a prophet." They'd reached a conclusion we Christians do not share—but they were also acting on it in a way shaped not by principle, but by a desire to maintain a public image at odds with the facts. Is there any area of life where you "fear the crowds" too much to act authentically?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I'd never grab your servants, abuse and kill them. Would I? Free me from the urge to wound even people I disagree with through words or actions that fall short of your honesty and compassion. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, June 12, 2024 - Matthew 22:7-14

Open to all—but respect the host

The king in this story seems harsh to us. In this story, though, the king was a "prop"—he acted as the hearers expected a king to act. Jesus' lesson was not about God, but about the invited guests, snubbing the feast, or showing disrespect to the host. "Some scholars suggest that the host would have provided special garments; others simply note that coming to a wedding banquet in soiled clothing would insult the host." * The parable asked the hearers (who were plotting to kill Jesus): how are you responding to God's invitation?

- Jesus wasn't teaching that we should wear tuxes to weddings. "The 'wedding clothes' represent a fruitful life lived in obedience to God's will. For the image, see Revelation 19:7-8. The metaphor is made possible by the significance of clothing in the ancient world, in which one's clothing exhibited one's character (thus, e.g., 'dress yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ' [Romans 13:14]; or 'All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ' [Galatians 3:27].)" ** As you respond to God's invitation to be part of the great kingdom feast, how "well-dressed" are you? Are there any areas of life where you feel like showing up in the spiritual equivalent of ragged shorts and flip-flops?

Prayer: Lord God, I want to honor your gift of forgiveness and salvation by "dressing" myself with the Lord Jesus Christ. Guide me in building a life that exhibits my gratitude and respect for you. Amen.

* HarperCollins Christian Publishing. *NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, eBook: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture* (Kindle Locations 220624-220627). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

** Eugene Eung-Chun Park and Joel B. Green, study note on Matthew 22:11 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 47 NT.

THURSDAY, June 13, 2024 - Luke 14:7-14

Jesus' wisdom about our inner spirit (not just about etiquette)

Jesus wasn't urging sneaky manipulation in this passage, a false "Aw shucks" modesty. He was calling us to set aside our obsession with rank and status and be at peace with who we are. Consistent with his entire life and teaching, he urged people to avoid selfishly pushing for their own recognition and advantage, to leave room for honoring others. (For a more extensive study, see the book *Descending into Greatness*, by Bill Hybels and Rob Wilkins.)

- Have you ever known (or maybe even been) a person like the ones Jesus noticed who "sought out the best seats at the table"? In what ways can that attitude show itself in school, games, the workplace, and even church work? What's the difference between healthy assertiveness, so that you can use your gifts to bless others, and the kind of self-promotion Jesus warned against? In the light of history, do you believe Jesus was well-meaning but naïve—or was he right?
- Jesus' point was bigger than party etiquette. Scholar N. T. Wright wrote, "Within Luke's lifetime thousands of non-Jews had become Christians.... Many Jewish Christians...found this difficult, if not impossible, to approve or understand. They were so eager to maintain their own places at the top table that they could not grasp God's great design to stand the world on its head. Pride...is the great cloud which blots out the sun of God's generosity." * In what ways can you welcome into God's family people to whom you might feel superior?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you have honored me by loving, redeeming, and accepting me. Help me keep growing in my ability to extend that same kind of generosity to others. Amen. •

N. T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, pp. 175-176.)

FRIDAY, June 14, 2024 - Luke 14:15-20

Flimsy excuses for skipping the feast

Jesus' hearers would readily see these excuses as flimsy when they heard them. "One normally would inspect a field before buying it.... One normally tested oxen before buying them.... Weddings were planned far in advance, so the new husband knew about the conflict before he agreed to come. Each of the excuses in vv. 18-20 is so weak that it would insult the host; together, it is clear that the excuses constitute deliberate dishonor." *

- Just before this story, Luke told about Jesus healing a man with a painful physical ailment (cf. Luke 14:1-6) on the Sabbath. Twice in that story, Jesus challenged the leaders who disapproved of his healing. Both times, Luke said, "They said nothing...they had no response." How did religious people so lock themselves into their hatred of Jesus that they couldn't even explain their thinking? What lessons can you learn from observing them sitting there in tight-lipped silence?
- Pastor Bruce Larsen wrote, "Jesus is dealing here with something depth psychologists did not begin to plumb until nineteen hundred years later—that life breaks down as a result of our defense mechanisms.... I had a good excuse for not having a more regular quiet time...for Bible reading and prayer. I would pray, 'Lord, I'm so busy. Help me simplify my schedule so I can put You first.' One day He seemed to say, 'Larsen, you haven't missed a meal in years.'" ** In what areas are you giving God excuses? How will you lower your internal defenses so that you can be more honest with God and with yourself?

Prayer: God, when I fall short of your ideal (and I do), help me not to hide behind flimsy excuses. Teach me to trust your love enough to honestly face the things that come between me and the life you offer me. Amen.

* HarperCollins Christian Publishing. *NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, eBook: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture* (Kindle Locations 233669-233676). Zondervan. Kindle Edition. ** Bruce Larson, *The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 26: Luke*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc. 1983, p. 228-230.

SATURDAY, June 15, 2024 - Luke 14:21-24

God's guest list from the highways and back alleys

Writer and preacher Brennan Manning wrote, "After reading the entire Gospel of Luke for the first time, a post-Valley girl said: 'Wow! Like Jesus has this totally intense thing for ragamuffins.'" * Jesus lived among many religious people who recoiled at the idea of sharing God's kingdom with "sinners" (a term they defined roughly as "not as good as I am"). He told some of them this story. The ending was shocking: against all established social protocol, the king invited even the town's street people to come enjoy the royal banquet.

- This parable isn't about "those poor people" who aren't like us. We all come to God's "banquet" as people who are spiritually "poor, crippled, blind and lame"—people who need God's grace. So the story poses two very personal questions. First, can you see the degree to which you are a ragamuffin before God, one more person who desperately and gratefully needs God's grace and mercy? Second, are you open to inviting and welcoming into God's kingdom the ragamuffins of all kinds who live around you, even if at first you might feel a bit uncomfortable in their company? What has helped you learn to bless others with humble gratitude, not as a superior lowering yourself to help an inferior?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you loved ragamuffin me enough to die for me, enough to promise to be with me every day. I ask you to guide me in the process of laying aside the rags of my pride, to serve you and others every day in love and gratitude. Amen.

* Manning, Brennan. *The Ragamuffin Gospel: Good News for the Bedraggled, Beat-Up, and Burnt Out* (p. 51). 1990/2000/2005: The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Family Activity: God wants everyone to R.S.V.P. to a grace-filled life! Encourage your child or youth to invite someone to church. Create special invitations asking the guests to R.S.V.P. for the opportunity to enjoy fun, fellowship, and faith with your family. Maybe the friend could come over for a slumber party on Saturday night, then attend worship the next morning.



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