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Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
October 15, 2023
ELW Holy Communion, Setting Eight

In Isaiah we are given a vision of the great feast to come, when God will wipe away death forever. In Jesus' parable about a great banquet, those invited do not come, so the invitation is extended to others. In our liturgy God spreads a table before us. Even amid anxiety and hardship we rejoice in the peace of God which surpasses all understanding. With great joy we feast at the table of the Lord, and we go forth to share the wonderful invitation with others hungering and thirsting for the abundant life of God.

A warm welcome to those who are here worshipping on-line with us today! Here at Grace Lutheran we believe God is active in your life. Even you being here now is testament of God's calling and leading in your heart, which you have faithfully heeded. So we welcome you, and pray that today you will be nurtured and that the gifts that God has graciously given you will be stirred for the sake of God's mission in the world.

Grace Lutheran worships, prays, and serves on the traditional and unceded lands and territories of the hən̓q̓əmiñəm̓ (Musqueam) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather to worship the Lord our Shepherd, in whom we shall not want nor fear. For our God leads us to green pastures and still waters, restoring our souls and guiding us in righteousness and faith. And so we come as anointed children of God, invited and welcomed to the table, lifting our praise in the house of the Lord forever. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

GATHERING SONG: As We Gather at Your Table (#522)

GREETING

The saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the steadfast love of God, the salvific fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

CANTICLE OF PRAISE (p. 185)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Holy God, you set before us every day a bounty of good things. Bring us to your feasting table, hungry for your Word, eager to rebuild community and relationship, and ready to receive your welcome for us and for all, that we might together celebrate the salvation in you, through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Isaiah 25:1-9

A reading from Isaiah.

After a hymn of praise acknowledging God as a shelter for the poor, the prophet portrays a wonderful victory banquet at which death—which in ancient Canaan was depicted as a monster swallowing up everyone—will be swallowed up forever. The prophet urges celebration of this victory of salvation.

¹O LORD, you are my God;

I will exalt you, I will praise your name;
for you have done wonderful things,
plans formed of old, faithful and sure.

²For you have made the city a heap,
the fortified city a ruin;
the palace of aliens is a city no more,
it will never be rebuilt.

³Therefore strong peoples will glorify you;
cities of ruthless nations will fear you.

⁴For you have been a refuge to the poor,
a refuge to the needy in their distress,
a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat.

When the blast of the ruthless was like a winter rainstorm,

⁵the noise of aliens like heat in a dry place,
you subdued the heat with the shade of clouds;
the song of the ruthless was stilled.

⁶On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples

a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.

⁷And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations;

⁸he will swallow up death forever.

Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.

⁹It will be said on that day,
Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.
This is the LORD for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 23

¹The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not be in want.

²**The LORD makes me lie down in green pastures
and leads me beside still waters.**

³You restore my soul, O LORD,
and guide me along right pathways for your name's sake.

⁴**Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil;
for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.**

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is running over.

⁶**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**

SECOND READING: Philippians 4:1-9

A reading from Philippians.

Though writing from prison and facing an uncertain future, Paul calls on the Philippians to rejoice and give thanks to God no matter what the circumstance. God's peace is with us and binds together our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ, especially when things around us do not seem peaceful.

¹My brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

²I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure,

whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 188)

GOSPEL: Matthew 22:1-14

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus tells a parable indicating that the blessings of God's kingdom are available to all, but the invitation is not to be taken lightly.

¹Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ²"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.' ⁵But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' ¹⁰Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹"But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹²and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen."

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

So about a year and a half ago, the TV-watching world was shocked by an event that happened at a certain televised awards ceremony, perhaps you might have an idea of where I'm going with this. It was the kind of event that even if you didn't see it happen, you probably would have heard of the after effects through word of mouth, social media, and the plethora of memes that inevitably would start creeping out from all the reaches of the internet. Of course, I'm talking about multiple-Oscar-award-nominee-and-one-time-winner and actor Will Smith walking up on stage to multiple-Oscar-award-show-host and comedian Chris Rock, catching him off guard and slapping him across the face right in the middle of a bit. Will Smith said his actions were under the guise of "protecting his wife." What did she need protecting from that would warrant such a violent and humiliating act? It wasn't physical harm or a threat against her personal well-being or the danger of losing some possessions or anything like that. What Will Smith was protecting his wife from, was a joke. An actual literal joke that Chris Rock made in her direction as a comedian. As in, someone who tells jokes for a living.

A joke. It was words. I get that words can be harmful of course, but as Chris Rock later commented on the event in a Netflix special about a year later, “whoever says that words hurt never got punched in the face.”

I know, there were a lot of mixed feelings around this particular incident. Few sided with Will Smith, saying that Chris Rock was out of line with his joke and he should have had more respect for others. But many sided with Chris Rock, saying that while the joke was admittedly in poor taste, that shouldn't incite that kind of violence and shame in retaliation. In that same Netflix special, Chris Rock confesses that he understood that Will Smith was dealing with his other personal issues which we won't get into here, and that he just took all that out on an “easy target” that unfortunately, was Chris Rock. It makes sense, I guess. I mean, I know which one I'd want on my side if I were in a fight, even though I don't agree with that kind of violence.

That just seems to be our language these days though, doesn't it? It's like the only way we can prove our point, the correctness of our opinion, our own righteousness, is by displaying feats of our strength, our might, our power. And that can be manifest in different ways. In the case that I was talking about with Will Smith and Chris Rock, it was through violence. At other times, it could be through influence we might have over others to get them to do what we want. Yet, sometimes we might just have to yell louder. It all seems to come down to who has the bigger stick, the stronger army, or the most nukes. It's about who has the will and the guts to do something crazy enough to shut those enemies up. Something like burning down entire cities because some of their inhabitants said no to a wedding invitation.

Sheesh, roid rage much?

Of course I'm talking about the parable that Jesus shares with us today. This parable that we don't often like, one we don't really understand, and one that most certainly doesn't paint a very favourable picture of God and God's kingdom. It's about a king who invites some folk to his son's wedding, and when they refuse to go, the king goes on a rampage, kills them, and burns their cities down. You know, I have a funny feeling as to why no one wanted to go to this party. The host seems to have some anger issues.

So when that A-list can't make it, well, they can't now because they're dead, the king starts inviting the B-list. All these folk can make it because they're probably afraid that their city would be burned down as well if they don't. And perhaps in their haste to make it to this last minute party, one of the attendees doesn't have on the proper wedding attire. So the king tosses him right up out of there. That's kind of humiliating. Better than being killed and having your city burned down, sure, but still it's pretty shameful to be thrown out because of a misunderstanding about the dress code.

We can see why we don't like this parable much. It just doesn't fit with our view of God. It doesn't jive with our good Lutheran theology that tells us that God is gracious, kind, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. It just doesn't make sense to us, because to us this doesn't sound like the kingdom, it doesn't sound like the body of Christ, it doesn't sound like God.

Isn't God supposed to be a shepherd who leads us to green pastures and still waters? Isn't God supposed to be merciful and forgiving? Isn't God supposed to be understanding and

compassionate and not throwing misdressed people out into the weeping and gnashing of teeth?

So what do we make of this parable? What is Jesus telling us?

Well, there's a reason why I brought up the whole Oscar Slapgate thing. And it's not because there was an unnecessarily violent response that didn't really fit the crime. It's not because this parable is about a king and Will Smith won an Oscar that night for the movie "King Richard." It's not even because I'm a huge Chris Rock fan and that I'm on his side on this one.

But I brought it up because this slap heard around the world was basically the only thing people were talking about around the Oscars that night. Everything else about that evening was pretty much forgotten, and there was a lot going on that evening (from what I remember at least). All the other nominees, winners, and presenters took a backseat because all the attention was put on this nonsensical violent incident.

When really, the point of the night was the *celebration*.

Wherever you might stand on these overly extravagant Hollywood celebrity parties that seem to only cater to the privileged insiders, we cannot deny that the point of that evening wasn't supposed to be about the slap. But the slap happened, and it took center stage. Everything else became secondary, which they shouldn't have.

And so that's what I see happening in this parable. We see this king going crazy. We hear of cities being burned down. We feel sorry for the guy who wasn't up to speed on his attire. We think about and focus on those things and we forget the point of the story, which is that there is a *celebration*.

A celebration of marriage. A celebration of community. A celebration of love.

So just as Will Smith's actions took away from the Oscars that night, so did this king's actions take away from his son's wedding. And, so do our actions take away from the celebration of God's redemption, salvation, and forgiveness.

See, don't we sometimes act like the king in lashing out against those who might not express their faith the same way as we do? Haven't we, from time to time, acted like Will Smith and intentionally and disproportionately hurt those who hurt us? How often do we try to play the gatekeeper in deciding who is in and who is out, while losing sight of the welcome, the inclusion, the love that invites us all into community?

My friends, let us not forget that there is a wedding celebration going on. Let us not lose sight of the commitment that God has for us as God's people, opening the doors for us to enter into the feast and the kingdom. Let us not focus on the misunderstandings and the evils around us, but continue our gaze toward God and God's ways of truth, righteousness, and grace.

I know, it's not hard to get distracted. We see something we don't like and we jump up in the name of protecting our faith, our traditions... our pride. We might be feeling a little beaten up as well so we try to save what we can however we can.

But in that hurt, in that desperation, in that reaching out for something... anything that would console us, God remains merciful and kind, and reminds us of who we are and whose we are: invited and welcomed guests of honour at the banqueting table, where our cups are overflowing with blessing as we are led into abundant joy and peace in the salvation and kingdom of God.

So in this season after Pentecost, a time when we look at our faith in the living Christ, may we be humbled by God's grace, comforted by God's welcome for us all, and drawn in by God's steadfast and unending love. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: United at the Table (#498)

CREED

Together with all welcomed at the banqueting table, let us confess the Christian faith with the Apostle's Creed:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.*
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Called into welcome celebration and community, let us pray for the church, the world, and everyone in need. Each petition will end with, "by your everlasting mercy, O God," and you are all invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. By your everlasting mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you are our shepherd and in you we are not in want. You bless us with your love and grace and strengthen us for your service. May our ministry in the world reflect all that you are, that all might know of your saving grace. We lift up in prayer our neighbouring faith communities; those that use our building for worship, work, and play; our partners Anglican Church of Canada and Moravian Church in Canada; and our bishops, pastors, rostered leaders, and congregations of the ELCIC. In particular, we pray for First Lutheran Church in Vancouver and their interim pastor Dave Lefsrud; and for all the Lutheran Campus Ministries across Canada. By your everlasting mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, we see the green pastures and still waters of the world, and we know that all that you have made is good. May our appreciation for your creation be reflected in our stewardship, that the beauty and wonder of this world be preserved and cherished. By your everlasting mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, you guide us along right pathways for your name's sake, and lead us into justice and peace. Grant your wisdom upon all world leaders and politicians, that we might all be able to put aside nationalistic differences and learn to work together for the good of all. We pray for all the areas of the world that face war, violence, and turmoil, as well as for those that we've sponsored to come into our country. We pray for the continued support of Abraham Barhane, and Solyana Amanuel; and for those who have not yet arrived: Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; and Filimon Abraha. By your everlasting mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, you anoint us and fill our cups with overflowing blessing and healing as you welcome us to your banqueting table where we find community, support, and wholeness. Be with all among us who are sick, who mourn, or feel lonely, that your love can be seen and felt by all. Especially we pray for Bryan and Chona; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Beulah; Bev and family; Sukhwant; John; Cari; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Will; Chris; Larry; Walter; Piet; Allen; Matt; Lucas; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...
By your everlasting mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, your goodness and mercy follows us all the days of our lives, and you welcome us to dwell in your house forever with you and all the saints. May we always recognize and accept this welcome and connection, that we be eternally aware of the body of Christ in which we all a part of and belong. By your everlasting mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your steadfast love and peace, in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.
And also with you.

MEAL

DIALOGUE

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

PREFACE

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
that we should at all times and in all places
give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God,
through our Saviour Jesus Christ;

who shows us the inclusive welcome we all share in your love, that we might join with the choirs of angels, the hosts of heaven, and the church on earth in praising your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 190)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

Holy God, in your humble power you bring us together to join in the feast that is to come, to live as a community and kingdom in your name, and to be your hands and feet in the world to welcome, to serve, and to show compassion to all in need. And you send to us Jesus, who leads us to and guides us in and teaches us of your ways of goodness and mercy, that your love might be reflected in all that we do.

For on the night that he was betrayed, your Son Jesus sat with his friends for a meal, where he took the bread, gave thanks, broke and shared it saying, "Take and eat, this is my body broken for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

And then after they ate, he took the cup that they all shared, gave thanks, and gave it to them to drink from saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me."

It is in this heavenly meal, therefore, that we feel our invitation, see our welcome, and join together in the celebration of your holy name and salvation as we together proclaim the basis of our faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

So it is to you, O God, that all glory and honour belong, for all that you do and all that you give in your blessing, in your mercy, and in the celebration of salvation that shall never end, through Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered together to be one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

**Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Take and eat, accept God's welcome for life, love, and grace.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 191)

Let Us Break Bread Together (#471)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, we give you thanks for again feeding and nourishing us with your love and grace, revealing to us the connection we share in your community by your Word, as you invite us and welcome us to the unending celebration and blessing, strengthening us to be your people in the world through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

The Shepherd of peace bless you and guard your hearts,
the Saviour of love lead you and guide you into all goodness,
and the Spirit of community welcome you into eternal celebration and joy, this day and always.
Amen.

SENDING SONG: By Your Hand You Feed Your People (#469)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, rejoice in the Lord always.

Thanks be to God.