

30 March 2025
“Meals with Jesus”

The Father’s Feast
Luke 14:1-6, 15-24

We read from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 14. First we read verses 1-6.

14 On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely. ²Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. ³And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, ‘Is it lawful to cure people on the sabbath, or not?’ ⁴But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away. ⁵Then he said to them, ‘If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a sabbath day?’ ⁶And they could not reply to this.

And now we read verses 15-24.

¹⁵One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, ‘Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!’ ¹⁶Then Jesus said to him, ‘Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. ¹⁷At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, “Come; for everything is ready now.” ¹⁸But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, “I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my apologies.” ¹⁹Another said, “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my apologies.” ²⁰Another said, “I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.” ²¹So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, “Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.” ²²And the slave said, “Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.” ²³Then the master said to the slave, “Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. ²⁴For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.” ’

Several times in his parables, Jesus described heaven as a feast. In Matthew, in the parable of the ten virgins, he talks about our life on earth as waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom, when the wedding feast will begin. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, when the worthless ungrateful boy “comes to his senses” and stumbles back to his father, what does the father do? He throws a feast to welcome him home. And then we have this parable, in which a great landowner sends out invitations to the master’s feast. We normally get our pictures of heaven from the Book of Revelation, where heaven is described in terms of architecture and which raw materials are used in constructing the walls and gates and paving the streets. But Jesus doesn’t talk about heaven as a place so much as he describes it as an activity: a wedding feast. Here on earth, we are able to taste just a hint of God’s goodness – there we will feast on it. There, at last, we will be satisfied.

And this feast that the Father will throw in the coming kingdom, it is a feast to which all are invited. That much is clear in the parable. That does not, however, mean that everyone will be there. In all three of the parables I noted above, some people are left out, by their own choice. Five of the ten virgins in Matthew didn’t prepare for the wedding feast and missed it. In the Prodigal Son, the older brother stands back in the darkness, refusing to join the father’s feast. And in our parable today . . . well, let’s start at the beginning.

Jesus has been invited to another dinner at a Pharisee's house. This time it's a Sabbath meal. On his way there, he sees a man with dropsy. Jesus stops, reaches out to take hold of the man, and heals him. This means that on his way to the Pharisee's house, Jesus potentially broke the Sabbath by performing a healing and probably made himself ritually unclean by touching a man with a visible disease. A little provocative from the start. Then, at dinner, he tells the parable. A great landowner sends out invitations to a feast, first summoning "those who had been invited." This was evidently a group that had long ago been set apart to be guests at this banquet. But those intended guests are too busy. They all have excuses; everyone has something else to do that's more important. So, in anger, the host sends his servants out to bring in everyone else. Sends them out twice, ordering his servants to invite the poor, the ragged, the homeless. Everyone. If the intended guests aren't interested, then we'll make everyone an intended guest.

In Jesus' 1st century Judean context, the meaning of this is clear – and would have been painfully clear to the Pharisee it was directed toward. The original, intended guests were the "Chosen People," the Jews, the children of Abraham, to whom had been given the Law and to whom had been sent the prophets. And now the feast was ready. The Messiah had come, fulfilling the Law and the Prophets, bringing abundant grace and freedom. But at least the leaders of the Chosen People weren't interested. They had their own stuff going on, like holding councils on how many steps a person could take on the Sabbath day and whether healing on the Sabbath was a sin. You think those legal distinctions are going to figure themselves out? No, sorry. We can't be bothered by anything else right now; we're swamped. So, Jesus' teaching to this Pharisee, his host, is this: "You know what? Never mind. We're going to open the gates to everyone. All previously issued invitations, based on group membership, are hereby cancelled. It's open seating now. Now the only qualification for admission to the feast is whether you're willing to come."

That's what the parable meant in the first century. It means the same thing to us. Through Christ, the Father has spread out a great feast – unlimited forgiveness, unfathomable love, inexhaustible grace, inexpressible joy, eternal life. God is good. But there are no reserved seats for Gold Club Members. This bounty is not offered us based on how long we've been church members or Methodists or Christians. Membership has no benefits. The Father's feast is offered freely to anyone who is willing to stop what they were doing and come.

Christ's teaching about a glorious feast is one of the things we remember through the celebration of Holy Communion. Our liturgy closes with the words, "until Christ comes, and we feast at his heavenly banquet." Among all the meanings that we draw from the sacrament, at least one is that it is to be a foretaste of the Father's feast. So it's something of a shame that we usually represent that feast with a tiny square of bread and shot glass of juice. Not so festive, you know? In the Apostolic Church, the Lord's Supper was a full meal. Now, speaking practically, we can't really do a full meal every time we do Communion. Nightmare logistics. But every now and then, we maybe could represent the Father's feast a little more lavishly.

Which brings us to today. In an early church document called, "The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus of Rome," from the year 215, there is a description of an ancient Communion service that is a bit more festive. The usual Communion service is designed as a memorial to God's greatest gift – Christ's sacrifice – but the Hippolytus Communion reminds us not only of Christ's death and resurrection, but also of God's bounty and provision from the beginning, and forever. with different symbolic elements to represent each gift. So let us begin:

Hippolytus Communion

Leader: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them up to the Lord.

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God

People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Let us pray. We give thanks to you, O God, through Jesus Christ and for that gift of your beloved only son. He came as Savior and Redeemer and Messenger of your love; through him you made all things and in him you are well-pleased; he stretched out healing hands to the blind and lame, stretched out generous hands to feed the hungry, then stretched out broken hands, taking on suffering for our sake on the cross, so as to heal our final wounds and feed our final hunger. Amen.

In a moment, we will come forward to these two tables. As you come forward, we invite you to extend your hand and be anointed with olive oil, a reminder of our anointing for Christ's service. Then, at the font, open your palm and receive a splash of water, a reminder of our adoption into Christ's family through baptism. Then you will proceed along one of the tables in front where you will first take of cheese and olives, reminders of God's blessing through the natural world. After that, there are small glasses of mixed milk and honey, a reminder that we have a promised land awaiting us. And then, at last, the bread and cup of the new covenant through Christ.

Obviously there are some logistics to consider. We ask you to pause, but briefly, at each element on the tables, reflect on God's goodness, then serve yourselves and move ahead. If there are parts of the communion that you aren't able to take, for whatever reason, simply skip over those. All the bread is gluten-free. We begin by blessing the elements.

Blessing of the Oil

O God, with such oil as this, you sanctified prophets, priests, and kings for your service. With such oil as this, your apostles anointed the suffering. You are the one who gives us the new wine and the new oil of the eternal kingdom. Sanctify this oil and all who receive it for your eternal healing and your eternal service.

Blessing of the Water

Lord, before we knew you, your grace knew us. Through the waters of baptism, you received us into your kingdom, adopted us into your family. Bless this water as we remember our baptism and are grateful.

Blessing of the Cheese and Olives

Lord God, yours is the fruit of the earth. As the psalmist says, you cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and bring forth food from the ground, wine to gladden the heart and oil to make the face

shine. (from Ps. 104:14-15). By this cheese and these olives, we signify the abundant gifts of your creation. Grant us true gratitude as we eat of them.

Blessing of the Milk and Honey

Eternal God, you once promised your people a land of plenty, calling it a “land flowing with milk and honey.” We, too, long for a Sabbath rest in your Promised Land. We take of this milk and honey, mingled together, as a reminder that though for now we can have only a taste, in your coming kingdom we will taste your faithfulness in full, and it will be good.

Blessing of the Bread and Cup

On the night before Christ gave himself up for us, he took bread, saying, “This is my body which is broken for you.” Likewise he took also the cup, saying: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

I invite you now to come forward, receive the oil, and water, then partake in the Father’s Feast.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here,

As we thank you for these gifts of bread and wine and for the promise of a land of milk of honey and for the bounty of this earth and for the cleansing waters of baptism and for the anointing of your Spirit to service.

Strengthen us through them,

so that we can be strength for others,
until Christ comes, and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

Through your Son Jesus Christ,

with the Holy Spirit in your holy church,
All honor and glory is yours, almighty God, now and forever.

Amen.