

Blessed To Be A Blessing – August 28, 2011

The Empty Seat

“And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle *are* killed, and all things *are* ready. Come to the wedding.”’ But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated *them* spitefully, and killed *them*. But when the king heard *about it*, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.’ So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding *hall* was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few *are* chosen.”

Matthew 22:1-10

It happens unto many in the course of life. A conflict in scheduling or plans and although you might like to oblige the invitation of your friends you must send regrets because you already have a commitment. However, if in the course of life, one is invited by a most important dignitary to attend a special event, the weight of that invitation makes it a priority and no one would dare to refuse, even if they had to change previous plans.

Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to such an event. The king invites his subjects to the wedding feast of his son. Who would refuse their king? The king expects that he will find not one empty seat in the hall. You can identify with the king when he learns of those who have made light of this most generous and serious invitation, not only spurning the king, but also shamefully treating and even killing his servants who distributed his invitation. Can you blame the king for his reaction? Destruction of the murderers and burning their city does not seem so “over the top” that we cannot understand the king’s rationale.

It doesn’t take much explanation for us get the point of the parable Jesus tells according to the eternal perspective. Refusing God’s invitation of grace and mercy to instead join in the persecution of his Son brings eternal death and suffering in hell. God wants His kingdom “full”....not one empty seat! We want to be in heaven too but our worldly nature overrides our sense of spiritual urgency and we become complacent believing that we have plenty of time to get ready for the “banquet celebration.” However, how many of us understand that the banquet celebration of eternal bliss has already begun? It exists among us in the Divine Service each time we gather in worship, whether at church or when the pastor brings communion to the homebound and sick. For each time God gathers and serves His people the portals of heaven are opened and we are reminded of the inseparable connection as the one body of Christ including all those who enjoy the eternal feast of heaven.

The feast of God’s grace and mercy is prepared. The invitation has been issued: “Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.” Through the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments God doles out the blessings of His kingdom to all believers present. There He gives to His guests that which we need the most: pardon for our iniquity, the very garment of Christ’s holiness that we might be properly adorned, for the celebration of life everlasting...His wedding gift to us! Are there any empty seats? It is not too late to go out on the highways and gather all we can find!

Pastor Jacobs

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