

Trinity 2 (2024)

Pious platitudes, we've all heard them, and no doubt – at one time or another – used them

For example, when a person has died, it is not uncommon to hear someone at the funeral home say: **“He (or she) is in a better place.”** Everyone nods in agreement.

If the person was a Christian, no doubt these words are wonderfully true.

“The strife is o'er, the battle done; the victory of life is won; the song of triumph has begun,” to quote one of our Easter hymns.

Jesus' own words confirm this belief: **“In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2).**

Nevertheless, this phrase, as in the case with many other truisms, can become little more than a pious platitude, something people say when they don't know what else to say, something to fill an awkward moment of silence.

Such was the case with another pious platitude which was the springboard for Jesus telling the parable recorded in today's Gospel, the Parable of the Great Supper.

It happened like this. Jesus was having a meal at the home of a prominent Pharisee. During this dinner, Jesus had said some things that would likely have made some of the other guests uncomfortable.

Perhaps during an awkward pause or in order to move the conversation to safer territory, one guest comes out with what only can be described as a pious platitude:

“Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.”

One can imagine the other guests nodding their heads in agreement.

Likely, this was a well-known and oft-repeated saying. But what was meant by “eat bread in the kingdom of God”?

To get our answer and indeed to understand the parable Jesus tells in response to this man’s words, we need to look back to the Old Testament. There we find, going back at least as far as Isaiah, that a great feast was associated with the coming of the Messiah and the age that was to follow. In Isaiah 25:6, we find these words:

“And in this mountain [Jerusalem] shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees,

of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.”

“Wines on the lees,” by the way, refers to the best, that which had risen from the residue at the bottom of the vat. Life’s too short for bad wine, especially in God’s new and coming age!

Let me pause here to say that real religion is anything but a joyless affair . . . all work and no play.

I once read about a school where no games or play were allowed. Why? /// Because such things were frivolous and unbecoming of Christian boys. /// That’s rubbish!

The application for us is that we need to be people of celebration.

This, of course, does not mean that there will be no times of deep sorrow and perplexity. In the words of the 23rd Psalm, there will be

times when we “**walk through the valley of the shadow death.**”

But even then, the knowledge that “**Thou art with me**” makes these times bearable. We are knocked down but not knocked out of the game of life.

The ultimate cause for confidence and inner joy at such moments is the cross. The cross draws an ‘X’ through the finality of death.

It snatches from tyrants, both ancient and modern, their ultimate weapon – death. In the words of Martin Luther’s hymn:

*The body they may kill:
God’s truth abideth still,
His kingdom is for ever.*

Because of God’s self-revelation we know where we came from, why we are here and where we are going. Life, even in the worst of

times, can have meaning and purpose.

Vindication is coming for all those who put their trust in the Lord, even as it came for Jesus on Easter morning.

Again, Christians are to be people of celebration. The most recognize Christian symbol is the cross. Why not add one more? A banqueting table? One laden with the best foods and choicest of wines?

But there is more we can learn from this parable. We also find in it a warning.

The man who came out with the pious words **“Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God”** along with those who nodded their heads in agreement assumed they had confirmed reservations at this feast. The parable Jesus tells in response says otherwise.

The Jewish nation, in particular the religious elite, were in danger of missing the party. They

are represented in the parable by those making excuses as to why they could not come.

These religious leaders said they were looking forward to the arrival of the Kingdom of God, but they were so caught up in their own affairs, they were in danger of being left behind.

The true King, David's long-looked-for successor, was in the midst, indeed sitting at the table with them, and they were not getting on board. Instead, they were preoccupied with such things as worldly prestige and outward appearances.

There are still men and women like that today. The world that now is is too much with them. They are too busy for God and the world to come.

To them and indeed to all of us come words found in Psalm 95: **“Today, if ye hear his voice, harden not your heart.”**

So, in this parable we find a warning. But it does not end on a somber note, but a joyful one.

The invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb is thrown open to all and sundry . . . to the very ones the Pharisees ignored and despised.

These included those Jews who were not able keep the Law with the same degree of rigor as they did, represented in this parable by “the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.”

Indeed, it was this class that was most drawn to Jesus. We are told in Mark 12:37, **“The common people heard him gladly.”**

But there is another statement in this parable which points us further afield still. We should not miss it. When the great man’s chief servant returned, he reported that the invitation had gone out and that many were coming. Then he adds: **“And yet there is room.”**

Who might be envisioned by these words?
/// The gentiles, those outside the covenant family. Soon the invitation would be extended to them as well.

The same thought is found in John 1, verses 11 and 12: **“He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”**

There is room for all. Though there is a mystery about the electing grace of God; nevertheless, the call of the Gospel is as broad as there are people. Whosoever will may come and draw out of the well of salvation. God puts no fences around it.

The good news is that there is room for you and me. An American Gospel song says

*Yes, I'm so happy to know and say,
"Jesus included me, too.*

Our part is to put on our shoes and come to the party.

What about you? Have you said yes to the royal invitation . . . not only with your lips but with your feet? ///

What a great parable this is that we have before us this morning.

It reminds us that Christianity is not a joyless religion. And, though it contains a solemn warning, it tells us that there is a place at the table for each one of us. No outcasts.

The man who came out with **“Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God”** did us all a favor. The parable Jesus tells in response is a ‘keeper’. Meditate on it. Make its message your own.

Some years ago, we had here at St. Luke's a Vacation Bible School the theme of which was: **“Jesus is giving a party, and we are all invited.”** Banners emblazoned with those words were hung around town.

Just perhaps it is time for them to be rehung. After all, the party is still on. Come to the feast!