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Pentecost 22

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“His Best, His Abundance, His All”

Text: Matthew 22:1-14 (Isaiah 25:6-9; Philippians 4:4-13)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

For most of us, fancy banquets are a luxury. A fancy dinner in a fancy place is a once in a while thing, for a wedding or some other special event. Most of the time, in our everyday lives, we eat more regular meals in more regular places in more regular ways.

But it is not so with God. For Him, fancy banquets are the norm. Because God doesn't do anything half-way. When He gives, He gives His best. When He gives, He gives His all. When He gives, He gives an abundance. And so when He invites the world to eat at His banquet, at His feast, He serves only the best of the best. Or as the prophet Isaiah told us: **“a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.”**

The question is, for the people in Jesus' time and for us today: *do we believe that?*

If we did, why would anyone not want to go to His feast? But not all go. In the parable that Jesus told today, some did not go because they were too busy - the things of this world demanded their attention and were more important than attending the feast. Others didn't go because they were hostile toward the king and his servants - they didn't see His goodness as being very good at all, but an unwanted, over-reaching imposition on them and their lives. And then there was the one who wanted to attend, but only on his own terms - not to wear the wedding garment of the king, thinking that his own clothes should be good enough. All these people did not see the feast as a gift from the king - as a feast of the best of the best. But as something *less* than that. Less than the best. Less than what they wanted and not really what they

needed.

Shame on them? *Shame on us*. Because when Jesus tells parables, they are not just crusty, dusty old stories about the Jewish people living back then, but are words spoken to you and me today as well. Mirrors to show us something about ourselves and windows to show us something about our Father in Heaven. And so it is for you and me today that the feast has been prepared and is ready, and to you and me today the call goes out to ***come to the feast!*** The best of the best is ready for you, the abundance of your good and gracious God. *Are you coming?* If we knew the gifts and what was here being given to us, how could we not?

But perhaps you are too busy for the daily feast of Word and prayer Jesus has prepared for you - so many other things demand your attention and are more important than attending the feast. And so taking time out to attend the feast is a burden, another unwelcome obligation in an already busy and hectic life.

Or maybe you are hostile toward the king - yes, because you feel like you're not getting the best but the leftovers in life. You feel let down, maybe even a bit angry, that your Lord is giving you less than you want and not what you need. Things aren't working out in your life quite as you had hoped, and so maybe there is resentment toward God and His meddling servants.

Or perhaps we want God to accept us on our own terms - not wanting to come to Him and His feast in humility and repentance and to wear His robe, the wedding garment of His righteousness, but wanting some recognition for what we have done, for our own righteousness. For surely our clothes are good enough; we have not dirtied ourselves as much as the next guy; we're good, honest, respectable people.

And so the truth is that with all these thoughts and temptations crowding our hearts and minds, it is easy to hear Jesus' invitation not as the wonderful invitation that it is, but as something less than that - as not so important as other things in our lives; as an added burden and obligation; even as an unwelcome imposition, interrupting and getting in the way of what I want and how I want to live. And then add to that that the feast itself doesn't look very spectacular - words, water, bread, wine, pews and pulpit occupied by sinful people . . . well, can't you do a little better than this, Jesus?

Well, *no!* And it is Isaiah who was sent to remind us of how good and rich and abundant this feast is, and of all that our Lord has done for us and gives to us here and everyday in His Word and Sacraments. This feast where God gives His **best**, gives His **all**, and gives an **abundance**. Isaiah says it was prepared for us on *“the mountain of the Lord”* - which is the mountain we now call Calvary. For there God gave His **best**: His only-begotten Son; He gave His **all**: laying down His life for us; and He gave an **abundance**: for in His death and resurrection, He offered Himself as the sacrifice for the sin of the world, and He swallowed up death forever. And so there, on the Calvary, our feast was prepared. There, on Calvary, the Lamb of God was roasted on the cross to be the food for our feast, and He poured out His blood into the cup that gives us life. There, on Calvary, all the Word of God finds its focus, and from there all the Word of God flows to us. There, on Calvary, is the beacon of God to break through the clouds of sin and doubt and disappointment, that we see the love of God for us in Jesus; that we may not reject, but rejoice, and be glad in the life and salvation of God. A life and salvation not that He simply demands, but that He gives.

For that is the purpose of His feast - whether it is the feast of Word and Sacrament that we gather here each week to receive, or the feast of Word and prayer that we receive each day - He calls us to come and receive what He has prepared for us. To receive His forgiveness for our sins, His life for our death, and His salvation for our slavery to sin. That is what Jesus is calling you to receive at His feast, and what you can receive no where else. Calvary may not have looked spectacular, but it was. And church may not look spectacular, but it is. And you may not look spectacular, but you are. Because behind the outward appearance of these things is a greater reality - the reality of Christ. Who not only came to Calvary, but has brought Calvary to you, so that He not return to the Father alone, but that He bring you to the Father. That the wedding feast be full.

And so this is not a feast that we can “take it or leave it” - **but truly a feast we cannot live without**. Not a luxury, that we’ll receive if time and life permit - but a necessity, for here is the life we need. The life that we need when the trials and troubles of this life are overwhelming; when the cares and crimes of this life come crashing down on us; when the burdens and obligations of this life make things seem hopeless. Where everything else fails, here is exactly

what we need. Here is the faith and strength and forgiveness we need to make it through - the good times, the bad times, and all the times in between.

And when we are fed by the King, by our Lord, it is at the feast with the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, including St. Paul, who said to us today: ***“Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice!”*** And when you feast with the King, you can rejoice - not because you will always be happy, but because you have a joy that is deeper than mere happiness. It is the joy of faith. The *confident* joy of living in our Lord’s forgiveness. The *patient* joy of living in His goodness. And the *humble* joy of living at the foot of His cross and empty grave. For there everything is in perspective. There we are focused on Jesus and His gifts. There our hearts and minds are put at peace, and we are given the gift of joy.

And this is what St. Paul went on to say to us, when he said: ***“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”*** But to think on these things, what else is that but to think on Christ? And to think on Christ then to think like Christ. And to think like Christ then to be like Christ. For feasting on Christ and His Word, and focusing on Him and His gifts, we too will be changed. Like Paul. No longer thinking only of self, but also of those around us, reviving our concern for them, and being content. And if there is one thing most (if not all) people in this world are looking for and striving for and working themselves to death for, it is contentment. But what is contentment but peace of mind and joy of heart? The very things given us here at the feast - the peace of forgiveness, and the joy of the love and salvation of God.

So many are yearning and searching and looking . . . and so the call is still going out. Our Saviour still calling through His church, through His servants, through you. Still calling you and all to the feast, to receive what we need most of all, until He calls us to the feast of which all our feasts here are but a foretaste of the feast to come! The wedding feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, the wedding feast of heaven, which will have no end.

Until then the call goes out. So come! Come to the feast. Today, and everyday. All is ready! Receive the gifts of the King and all He has for you. For

it is all the best, all in abundance, all for you.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.