

Sunday, October 15, 2023 *“Banquet Open to All”*

Isaiah 25:1-9 Philippians 4:1-9 and Matthew 22:1-14

King Charles and Queen Camilla held their coronation celebration on May 6. As part of the celebration invitations were sent to 2200 notable people including members of the royal family, representatives of the Church of England, other Christian denominations, prominent politicians from the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth of Nations, foreign royalty, heads of state and heads of government, and British and foreign celebrities. Guests from 203 countries were invited to attend the service representing at least 158 countries with 154 UN member states, two UN observer states and Kosovo. There were 16 monarchs, 70 heads of state and 10 prime ministers. Many of these guests also attended the coronation reception and concert.

The invitation was a decorative piece of artwork filled with symbols and were sent around the world to people based upon their familiar, political or some ideal connection to the king and queen. There were some political leaders who were invited but due plane malfunction, a violent situation in their country or pending election, 3 people did not go. There were also people not invited, disinvited and no communication either! (Wikipedia)

But the television audience included many people from around the world watching the pomp, pageantry, historical traditions and what was said shared and celebrated. The coronation marked the beginning of the reign of King Charles III and a new era in British and world history. Of the 7 billion people in the world 2200 people were invited to watch celebrate and experience this moment in history.

Our reading from the prophecy of Isaiah 25 is in contrast to what is presented in the previous chapter. Isaiah presents the pending judgement on the earth and the destruction of it. But then he writes about the signs, images, metaphors, hints, and exercises in playfulness as well as which let us see God's actions to come. In this passage different people are presented—those who fear God, and those who glorify him. There are those who will experience fierce judgment “the ruthless” for they will be excluded by their own choices and those who will

experience a banquet of abundance which is intended for “all peoples” that is, all those who choose life.

Just think about our troubled world today- war continues now in two areas— Ukraine/Russia and in Israel; still storm damages rage and there is unrest with unions and employers; and people are seeking safe places to live in the world. But it was just last week when we as Canadians gathered for thanksgiving—a day to eat at a banqueting table full of good food. But what happened to those who could not afford the basics—food hampers were distributed, special meals were hosted and all who wanted to come and eat did so. In spite of the state of the economy, rise in homelessness and need for families to have food, there was feasting! And prayerfully a time of thanks to God was offered!

According to Isaiah’s prophecy, there will come a time of celebration and feasting. Those who come to the feast will eat rich food and drink well aged wine. They will have a good experience and celebrate life to its fullest. God will wipe the tears from all faces and the disgraces of his people will be taken away from the earth for this is God’s will. God will host this feast this banquet! And who are invited? All people. Yet not everyone has received the invitation! Nor have they acted upon it!

Banquets galas and special gatherings usually take much time to plan. Corporate galas and dinners are often used for fundraisers charitable organizations or to recognize business associates. These gatherings are often exciting as it is a time to dress up a little bit and enjoy the evening with friends and new people alike. Weddings are considered in these categories today, especially some situations where large families attend the celebration. And there is much planning for these today as well- food, décor, and what the experience of the festivity is like overall. This is what both hosts and guests seek when an invitation is sent and received. But what happens if those who are invited, accept the invitation and just don’t come?

Jesus’ parable of the wedding banquet poses several questions to the listener. We hear the story: A king gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet but they would not come. Again he sent other slaves to tell those who have been invited that the dinner is ready- the ox and calves have been

slaughtered and cooked and everything is ready. But the guests who had been invited made light of it went away- one to his farm, another to his business and the rest of those invited seized the slaves, mistreated them and killed them. The king received word of what had happened and was enraged.

The king's anger had him send troops to destroy the murderers and burned their city. Then he said to more of his slaves, the wedding is ready those who were invited were not worthy. Go into the streets and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet. They returned with guests good and bad and filled the wedding hall.

But when the king came in to see the guests, one man was not wearing a wedding robe. He asked, "How did you get in here without a robe?" The man was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot and throw him into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Jesus concludes this story "For many are called but few are chosen."

Can you imagine the bride and groom hearing about the horrible things leading up to their wedding celebration? Guests were invited- and some found reasons not to go—farms and businesses; others literally killed the messengers or slaves of the king. Why didn't they want to go? We don't know all the reasons—but it could be because they could not do what the king said or they did not deem themselves worthy? But those who mistreated and killed the slaves enraged the king. They were discovered and where they lived was destroyed. The king also called these former guests as unworthy.

The king still had a wedding hall to fill and a lot of food to eat. He wanted to still impress the people of his power and reign. So the servants rounded up people of all kinds but forgot a key item—the wedding robe—which would make everyone appear the same. But not everyone was the same- some good and some bad. Some came for the food, some were there for the experience, and some were there to cause problems. When the banquet takes place, the king mingles and sees that there is one man without a robe for the party. He is questioned by the king and with no response given, the king tells slaves to throw him out. This seems so harsh on the part of the king! But the guest is turned out and injured.

What does this story mean for us? We are all invited to something so big there is no hall large enough to hold all the guests- it is God's heavenly banquet in the Kingdom of God. It is open to everyone, not only Jews who heard Jesus share this story. We are invited to the celebration with the best food and wine and the celebration will continue. But in the story there are people who don't accept the invitation—they don't need another banquet to attend, they'd rather spend their money and not spend time with those like them who are in need of the not just food but what God offers. They don't accept God's gift, because money, responsibilities, and relationships stand in their way on different levels. This invitation is for everyone but not everyone accepts it. All are invited but one has to accept the invitation to come follow and be with Him at the banquet and one has to show up!

How disappointing it is when a wedding which is planned months in advance and there might be 8-10 guests not show up—yes sure illness happens but the plans are made to include them and their meal is paid for? There is no time to substitute guests. There have been times when I've attended receptions when people have not attended the reception because they decided they just didn't feel like it so why accept the invitation?

In the parable the king wants to celebrate the wedding of his son. He wants the people to come to enjoy the time together and relax and celebrate the occasion. But when the servants are told to fill the hall with everyone they can, not everyone adheres to the dress rule there are definitely awkward moments. In this story, one guest stood out before the king because he did not have on the right robe. Had he not attended a wedding before and not known that certain attire was expected? We don't know what happened at all. Maybe he had been asked to bring with him a suitable garment but still chose not to wear it as it was not elaborate enough? Maybe such robes were made available for the guests by the staffers and if he wore it he wouldn't stand out? Or maybe he had been offered the robe to wear and just refused to acknowledge the importance of the occasion; after all he was a place sitter and he was there to eat the food but not really celebrate the wedding of the prince. Or maybe he was just going to dine and dash?

The king was enraged—on a scale of 1-10 this king has some major anger issues- he has the guest thrown out and beaten up. Not only had the guest come and eaten, he disrespected the king, the prince and his bride who married but all the other guests who complied with the etiquette and protocol to celebrate the marriage.

(I've seen this when the invitation is casual clothing- but when photos are taken of a summer outdoor wedding and the guest has a see through muscle shirt—or a bathing suit top with shorts sometimes I wonder! It is still a wedding celebration! Have some respect for yourself and where you are going!?)

But what does this parable teach us? God offers to all people the gift of salvation freely and openly. This is the promise of the kingdom of heaven that we will be united with Christ and there is a huge celebration. But how do we tell others of this gift when where we share the message is not where people are listening? How do we share the invitation to everyone as God's feet and hands on earth? How do we tell the message of the Son who made it possible that we can live eternally in heaven? And how might we respond to the people who seek God but are not sure what to do?

All we need to do as say come to worship with me; come to hear the message; and if not right away- direct them to the website where they can see worship services print out sermons and even find out more about the message of Jesus.

All are called but those chosen by God will not miss the feast. Let's make heaven crowded—because for those who believe in Jesus and the promise of eternal life which he made possible, we should want heaven's banqueting table to be full.

One can only imagine how God feels when people do not come to the table of His Son Jesus. Jesus asks us to remember him as he dies and rises to new life. Are we forgetting that this banquet is for all people? There is only one proper attire for the feast—to know the Son as Saviour. So let's set more places!

PRAYER: God of grace and hope hear our prayer as we seek to make heaven full of your chosen people. Help us to share Christ's message of love that many are called. Remind us of how we may tell others this promise of eternal life and how Jesus is calling us now. SILENCE. Amen.