

ANOTHER FEAST

Beyond our understanding you alone are God; you speak to a world of brutal rule and shallow indifference, of terrorism and “reality” programs: may the one who came to sit at table with the victimized and excluded disturb our barren peace, contention, and call us to another feast where only love may rule; through Jesus Christ the bridegroom.

A Collect for Proper 23, Prayers for An Inclusive Church

THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Proper 23A: Isaiah 25:1-9; Psalm 23; Philippians 4:1-9; Matthew 22:1-10

OCTOBER 15, 2017

ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

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THE GOSPEL READING: MATTHEW 22:1-10

Once more Jesus spoke to the people in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who 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, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

What feast will we have?

What feast do you want, will you give yourself to bringing to pass, will you join in imagining, and creating?

There’s an unusual contrast in today’s scripture readings. Typically, we might hear or say ourselves that we see the God of Hebrew scripture, the Old

Testament God, as angry and vengeful and the God of the New or Christian Testament to be loving and forgiving.

But today, we see contrasting images of feasts that raise a question about that usual distinction.

In Isaiah: “On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of

well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. ...he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth...”

And in Psalm 23: “You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me; you have anointed my head with oil, and my cup is running over.”

So these Old Testament images are of a rich and abundant inclusive feast at the table of the God of all compassion.

But the picture from Matthew’s gospel is very different indeed, the wedding banquet that Evite or Paperless Post couldn’t have handled – with the first set of guests destroyed and their city burned (hard to do that online), and another set of guests, a hodgepodge of the good, bad, and ugly, gathered to replace them.

And so there’s a question: what feast will we have, will we commit to – both attending and offering to others.

The contentious, polarized, violent scene in Matthew’s gospel looks a lot like our world, with a lot of people thinking their group of guests is going to prevail over the others and going to any lengths to make their idea, their will, triumphant... and, no doubt, more

people – maybe a majority of people staying behind closed doors, no feasts for them, thank you very much, peaceful isolation and a warm screen seems like a good choice, staying out of the fray and happily distracted from reality....

As I’ve pointed out in previous weeks, Matthew’s community of Christians engaged in a decisive parting of the ways with Rabbinic Judaism. It’s worth pointing out that the passions ran high on both sides of the split and everyone was anxious about what was next from the occupying Romans – something we’ll see in the gospel reading next week.

One writer said this about the fight, depicted in the gospel reading today: [In the eyes of the followers of Jesus] “The conquered Land of Israel, ruined Jerusalem, the destroyed Temple, and the ethnic descendants of the nation of Israel had all lost a special claim to salvation. And from this time onward, they fervently believed, the fulfillment of the divine plan would be accomplished through a Kingdom of Heaven reserved for Christians alone.”

It is this notion we see portrayed in this gospel reading today.

Part of the parable resonates with what we more broadly recognize in the life of Jesus: the image of Jesus upbraiding a

complacent humanity, which fits with other accounts of Jesus awakening people to the presence of God, reaching out to all, those in established positions of wealth and power and also to the lost, the least and the left out.... The gathering of anybody and everybody, good and bad, these things seem familiar....

But Jewish Matthew's telling also reveals the anxieties, the stresses of his moment in history, and the way in which we can find ourselves either literally or figuratively wanting to send out the armed troops to kill off our opponents, anyone who doesn't agree with us.

And we see that sad story repeated time and again. (This is what is at play in the horrendous Somalia bombings this week... just one example of many violent episodes either spurred or potentiated by religious or sectarian allegiances.)

More broadly, in our overall faith lives, we hear an authentic voice of Jesus asserting itself again and again, both through scripture and through the deep wisdom and practice of the people of God: "love one another as I have loved you." The invitation is always the invitation of compassion, the resolution of contention, animosity, violence, loss in another feast, a feast beyond our deeply destructive human anxieties.

What feast will we have?

What feast do you want, will you give yourself to bringing to pass, will you join in imagining, and creating?

We have the grace, the gift of living after many other expressions of following Jesus through the ages, the gift of sacred listening and deep listening beyond the sectarian and divisive eras, in which various camps of faithful people have both lost their way and found their way.

And we live in a particular time in which the largeness and oneness of God is an increasingly compelling experience for many throughout the world. In some ways, whatever is emerging in this post-enlightenment, post-institutional era is still new, still forming.

And we have the incredible gift of discovering not only the challenge but also the delight of surprise, the unexpected hope in surveying the table and realizing that where we are and as who we are, a feast more like Isaiah's vision is forming even in the midst of the fears that continue to divide and destroy children of God around us.

The feast we want – the feast that is likely better than any we may have thought possible – is calling us, not only to take our place, but to take action, to be part of the inviting, the preparation of the table, certainly the serving, the sharing of all the richness that God makes available to

us and to all....

“On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.

“... the Lord GOD will wipe

away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth...”

Here is the feast God envisions.

What feast will we have?



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