

PENTECOST: ALIVE IN THE SPIRIT OF HOPE

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost

October 9, 2005

Proper 23

Isaiah 25:1-9

Psalm 23

Philippians 4:1-9

Matthew 22:1-14

Responding to a Special Invitation

God has lovingly called us to a restored fellowship with him through Jesus Christ. How have you responded, knowing that you have been designed for this purpose?

The parable that Jesus shares in Matthew 22:1-14 makes a statement the Church can relate to today. He wasn't merely speaking about the religious society of the day, but rather about people who wear the mask of religion without fully partaking in the spiritual relationship.

The Scripture doesn't say why the individuals refused to respond to the first invitation. However, think about this question: If you were invited by a king to attend a royal function, would you just "pencil him in" or tell him "let me try to work you into my schedule"? Probably not.

So why do people refuse the King's generous offer? The answer can be found in the following three factors:

- Underestimating the power of the invitation
- Underestimating the authority of the One who invited them
- Underestimating the authenticity of the invitation

By taking these three things so lightly, the people have missed an opportunity to fellowship with the King who wants to usher them into his presence and provide them with a great blessing.

The Scripture text, however, mentions that the second time the servants are sent, the invited guests ignore the call and leave to attend their farms and stores. Additionally, some have tortured, even killed, the messengers sent to them.

So often believers get "too busy" to enjoy God's plan and get caught up with life issues and work with human-sized strength to control the future. We want it done our way instead of accepting God's preparations. By being so stubborn, we find ourselves toiling in vain, when we could be enjoying the blessings of God.

Finally, the text describes a man who has heeded the call, yet has been cast out because of his attire. He represents those who come but are not prepared to receive God's blessings graciously.

According to the custom of the day, the master would provide an outer garment for his guests. Guests knew that the host had made special preparations in expectation that they would come. Today, many are mistaken about what it takes to be prepared for fellowship with God. They get wrapped up in feelings of guilt and inadequacy.

But the truth of the matter is that we can't live up to perfection in our own strength. It is not by our righteousness that we can enter into the feast, but rather by God's grace. Neither what we have done in the past, nor the "good" things that we try to do in the present will impress God.

As Jesus demonstrated to Peter when washing the disciples' feet (John 13:1-17), God has revealed to the Church that his love and grace have already provided everything that is needed. The prophet Isaiah also reminds us that the LORD All-Powerful has already prepared the feast (25:6) and bids us to come to his banqueting table. We need to be willing to accept this offer with grace and humility.

This week's Reflection was prepared by Keishia Louis, a freelance writer and contributor to the Bible Resource Center website.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Sri Lanka – With prayers for “Year of the Youth” and for wisdom to prepare suitable Scriptures for the young people of Sri Lanka; Pakistan – With thanks to God that, for the first time in the history of the Pakistan Bible Society, a Catholic Urdu Bible is being released, with thanks to God that the New Urdu Computerized Bible has been completed, and with prayers that the relationship developing between the Roman Catholic Church and the Bible Society will continue to grow; Afghanistan – With prayers for the restoration of peace and prosperity in Afghanistan and for opportunities during the rebuilding of Afghan society to distribute God's Word, particularly the Dari New Testament and the Dari Book of Genesis; Iran – With prayers that Christians in Iran will be constantly aware of God's guidance and protection, that Scriptures in appropriate languages will be made available to believers, despite restrictions on importing and printing, and that the government and society will be more open to Christian activities and influence.

Activity Corner: “Bible Banquet”

Supplies needed: Bible; Bible Dictionary or Encyclopedia; Bible Concordance; construction or drawing paper; crayons/markers; 3 x 5 index cards; pens/pencils; food for the banquet.

Read Isaiah 25:1-9 and Matthew 22:1-14. Based on these two passages, discuss how a banquet or feast is a sign of God's love and grace.

Plan a “Bible Banquet” of foods used in Bible times. Consult a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia for suggestions. Using construction or drawing paper folded in half, prepare invitations and invite a neighbor or someone new to your community or church. On the front of the invitation write “Come to the Banquet” and inside write “Everything is ready” and provide the date, time, and place. At the banquet, distribute index cards on which are written Bible verses that pertain to foods eaten in Bible times. (A Bible concordance may help you locate appropriate passages.) Prior to the meal, invite each guest to read a Bible verse aloud to everyone present. Sing together the Doxology (“Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow”) or a favorite hymn of thanksgiving.

The following resources may be helpful in learning about foods eaten in Bible times: *A Biblical Feast: Foods from the Holy Land* by Kitty Morse (Berkeley, CA: 10 Speed Press, 1998) and www.ariga.com/visions/biblfood/wheat.htm website.