

Proverbs 9:1-6
Luke 14:25-34

15th Sunday After Pentecost
Midway Presbyterian Church
September 10, 2023

Coming and Going

Introduction to the Old Testament Lesson

In our Old Testament Lesson this morning we will hear of God's Wisdom as a banquet host who sends out servant-girls to invite the simple and those without sense to the feast she has prepared. This invitation contrasts with the invitation of Folly, or The Foolish Woman a few verses later. Wisdom's banquet leads to life, Folly's to death. Listen to these words from Proverbs 9:1-6...

Introduction to the Gospel Lesson

In The Parable of the Great Dinner we will hear of a festive meal to which invitations have gone out. God's kingdom is a place of joy, but not all receive it. Listen to these words from Luke 14:25-34...

Sermon

Today I want to give you a very simple framework for answering the question: "What does Christ want of us?" It is found in our Gospel Lesson about a man giving a great banquet, sending out invitations, and when everything was ready, some refused to come. But the host continued to invite until he had a house-full. The answer to the question, "What does Christ want in simple terms," can be put around two words. Christ wants us to *come* and he wants us to *go*.

First Christ wants us to come and receive his gifts. In our scripture, the man prepared a banquet and invited people to come. Giving a great banquet was a practice of the upper classes in that part of the ancient world. It was an important social event where connections could be made and nurtured. The host invited people beforehand and told them of the day the banquet

would be held, but not the hour. Then when the food was ready, the host would send servants to tell those who had accepted the invitation to come.

But here in our parable, the people who had at first accepted the invitation began to make excuses. The bottom line was that they had other priorities. The host had gone to all that trouble to prepare the banquet with all of the good things that went with it. He wanted them to come. He invited them to come, but they backed out.

Mark 4:2 says that Jesus “taught them many things in parables.” God has provided for us a banquet and has given us the offer of many blessings that can be ours in the Kingdom of God. For example, we are offered the gift of love—the love of God in Christ that was so great that the Son was willing to die for us. That it makes no difference what we have been or what we’ve done, his love is still ours to receive. No one of us need ever feel that we are nobodies. Each one of us is a somebody, a somebody loved by the eternal God of all creation. That’s our value; that’s our worth. When we accept that love, we know we are blessed. Christ wants us to come and receive the gift of his love.

Again, he has offered us the gift of forgiveness. All of the sins that clutter up our past can be taken away. He has offered the chance for us to erase the blackboards of our lives of all those deadly sins that have hurt us and others. The guilt and shame of it can be taken away. Whatever we have done, whatever we have been, we can start anew with Christ. He died for our sins. His forgiveness is offered to all. His love. His forgiveness.

Then he has offered us the gift of his peace and his help to overcome life’s sorrows and hardships. There are tough times and hard roads to travel, difficult moments, dark valleys to get through, even the valley of the shadow of death. But he will be with us and help us get through

the difficult times. He has promised us his peace, his comfort, his strength. His gift to each one of us. His love. His forgiveness. His peace and help.

Then, he has promised us eternal life, as well as the quality of life now that enables us to know peace; that enables us to know purpose; that enables us to know the joy of our salvation. And to know that he has prepared a place for us in heaven. As the choir just sang, “I’ve got a mansion just over the hilltop. In that bright land where we’ll never grow old.”

He offers his blessings—if we will come to the banquet. But we don’t have to. No one is going to make us come. Christ will not make us come if we are unwilling. It has to be our choice. It’s a decision that every one of us has to make. Do we recognize our need for his gifts? His love? His forgiveness? His help as we struggle with the problems of life? Do we want this quality of life that is eternal—the knowledge of our eternal salvation? It’s our choice.

He has offered these blessings to us, but like the people in the parable, we can give excuses. We don’t think we need them. Or we’re too busy for them now. We don’t have to come to the banquet. But if we don’t come, we miss out on the feast and all the joys of it and the hope and the love of it and the life of it. Christ has offered himself, but we have to come and receive him and his gifts.

In John Bunyan’s classic *Pilgrim’s Progress*, there is a character called “the Man with the Muckrake.” This man rejected salvation to focus on filth. He spent his life raking up the straws and the dirt and the mud. All the time he was working, raking up the mud and muck and mire, an angel in heaven stood with a crown, waiting to put it on his head. If only he would look up, then the crown of glory could be his. But he never did. He was too involved with raking up the muck, too involved in earthly affairs, so involved with what he wanted to do, that he never took time to look up and see all the glory that could be his.

Sometimes we get so focused on what we are doing, so involved in the things of our lives, that we never take time to contemplate what has been offered to us, what joys and glories God has for us in Christ. Christ wants every one of us to come and receive his blessings.

But Christ also wants us to go and share what we have received. Once we have come, then there is the going. This is the other side of the coin of discipleship. In the parable, those invited said no, so the host said to his servant, “Okay, go out into the streets and lanes and bring in the poor and the blind and the maimed and the lame. Let them come and eat. And after that, go out into the hedges and byways and invite everyone who wants to come, for the banquet has been prepared.” There were blessings he wanted to share, and the servants had the privilege of going to those who were considered the forsaken and forgotten people of that day to tell them that there was good news. There was a banquet prepared for them. There were blessings in store for them if they came to the banquet. And in fact, the place was overcrowded with those who came.

There’s a book in our church library by Elizabeth O’Connor entitled *Journey Inward, Journey Outward*. There she tells of The Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C. as a prototype of a renewed church. She describes the need for the church to hold in balance structures that provide an “inward journey” of engagement with God, with self, and with others. But also structures that promote an “outward journey” of involvement with the world and the needs of people.

Yes, first Christ wants us to come and receive what he offers, but then he wants us to go and share it with those who need it. He wants us to be a witness. He wants us to take out to others what we have found. The love we receive, we are to pass on. The forgiveness that we have received, we are to practice toward others. The help in Christ we have found, we need to point others toward it. The eternal life that is ours, we are to point others to. In word and deed,

Christ wants us to witness to all the blessings that God has in store. What we have received, we are to share.

We do that in several ways. We do it by feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. By being like the Good Samaritan in another parable in Luke 10, where a Samaritan on the road to Jericho cared for a man beaten by robbers and left half-dead. As we meet the needs of others, we witness to the love of Christ in us. We do it by fighting for justice and righteousness and truth. We do it by living a life that is a good example in the home and in the community and in the places where we work and play and go to school. The goodness and kindness of our character and of our spirit is a witness to Christ. We do it by word, by telling others what we have personally discovered in Christ.

Jesus said, “The fields are white for the harvest, but the laborers are few.” (Lk. 10:2) Yes, we need to nurture our spirits, we need in inner journey to develop a closer relationship with Christ, but we also need outreach, because that is the way the kingdom comes. It has been said that without the telling and the sharing, the Christian faith is one generation away from disappearing. We can be the servant in the parable going out to invite others to the banquet. If they’re not already attending a church, we can invite those neighbors or people we work with (or go to school with or play with) to church. We can share with them the joy that we have discovered in Christ. We can reach out to those who visit our church or move into our neighborhood. We were meant to receive our Lord’s blessings, enjoy them, and share them.

What does Christ want of us? He wants us to come and receive his blessings. Then he wants us to go and share them with others. That leads to life for us and for others as well.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.