



SAINT MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*A Proper 23, Isaiah 25:1-9, Matthew 22:1-14
St. Mark's, Little Rock, 10-15-17
Danny Schieffler*

St. Barnabus Episcopal

over in Tullahoma TN

may not be known for everything

But they are known for the feast they put on every Sunday

at coffee hour

It was my first day of field education

in seminary.

I was expecting coffee.

Instead there were large tables pushed together

And they were covered up were deviled eggs,

Dips, chips, veggies

little sandwiches

fruit

cookies,

cake

pies and more.

From the way it appeared

nearly everyone had brought something

But there's no doubt

that absolutely everyone got fed.

In fact, there was more than enough.

It was a feast.

Whenever Jesus and the prophets

wanted to talk about God's kingdom

or the reign of God,

they would often talk about it as a feast.

And as a foretaste of the heavenly feast,

The church points to the Eucharist.

Each week

The people bring offerings

of bread and wine

and together with the clergy

offer them to God

And by the power of God

through Christ

bread, though still bread,

becomes

so much more than bread

And the people

though still people

become so much more

than they could ever become alone

And because of God's presence

even after worship sometimes there are moments

when life itself

becomes a feast.

For in the words of Rite I

Here we offer and present unto thee O Lord

our selves

our souls and bodies

To be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee.

And then God does what God does best

Changes lives

Forgives sins

Grant second chances

And wherever before

there was hell

Because of God

now and tomorrow there is hope.

In today's gospel

Again the feast is a symbol for the Kingdom

And a symbol so important to Jesus

that he literally spent part of his last weeks on earth

teaching about it in the Temple

Looking over to the Pharisees

He says you want to know what the kingdom of God is like

It is like a wedding feast

And not just any wedding feast

But a feast given by a King

a banquet fit for a king's son.

Its at this point though in Jesus's allegory

as told by Matthew

that we see this is not a normal wedding feast.

Because after the invitations go out-

nothing happens.

The feast is ready

but the invited guests do not come.

And though this is first century

some of the reasons given for not coming
sound straight out of the 21st.

They've got other things to do.

Priorities are too misplaced

In some of the guests' minds

There are other things more important
than the king's feast.

One of them says he got to go out to his farm

Another one

Says he's got some business to attend.

Basically, these folks

are too busy for the King

which means in the allegory

they are too busy for God..

Carl Jung once said

"If satan can't make you bad

He'll make you busy.

Busyness is not just from the devil

It is the devil.

Back in the allegory

once the king finds out

the invited guests
have more important things to do,
he invites others to come
and so as the story progresses
note that it seems everyone has an invitation
even though not everyone accepted
But some of them do
And they enjoy the King's generosity
And because this is the kingdom
Perhaps some realize that life itself
is intended to be a foretaste of the feast.
However, when get to the second part of the allegory
not everybody gets it.
Because there is still one guy
who though he is at the feast
is missing out on the joy of the feast.
Because according to the allegory
He hasn't put on his wedding attire
In other words
Even though he's at the feast of the kingdom of God
And massive grace is all around

He hasn't responded to it

he hasn't yet put on Christ

in effect

he is living a life

completely oblivious to God's will for his life

through baptism.

Its like he's going through the motions of being at a feast.

but he's not really feasting .

He's going through the motions of life

but he's not really living.

It could be any number of things

Perhaps he's trying to control his life and those around him.

Rather than letting go

and trusting in God.

Maybe attachments to money and wealth

sit on the throne in his heart

instead of Christ.

Or perhaps he is simply worrying about things

over which he has no control.

But whatever reason

This man is standing at the feast of God

But not truly appreciating it

and so as the allegory comes to an end for him

because of his own failure to respond

he finds himself in darkness

weeping and gnashing his teeth.

It's at this point though

and our lives

and the allegory

are quite different.

For the people who are too busy for God

and for the man in the allegory

not really living a life befitting the kingdom

it is too late.

Their story is over.

But ours is not

And it is not too late

for us.

For again and again

all through the Scriptures

God calls people to return

God calls people to come back to God's feast

And even now the table is being prepared

And the feast is ready

And there is room for all.

One of the remarkable things about the survey

that over 200 of you took last month

is the new vision to which so many of you pointed

a renewed vision that God seems to be giving us

and a desire to be at God's feast,

and especially to invite others

to join the feast

and for more and more people

to know the joy of God's kingdom.

The number one desire expressed for the future

across every generation

is for us

for St. Mark's

to reach out and help

more people on the margins of society

as well as those

who have been broken by life circumstances.

Younger generations want to get involved and lead

Middle generations want to grow

And Older generations want to leave a legacy.

Your vestry and your stewardship team have been listening

and based on your desires and dreams

have prepared a dream budget for next year

It includes leadership development and opportunities for millennials

Missions to help those ravaged by hurricane and earthquake

Partnering to assist other Episcopal Churches

Especially a struggling congregation

Spiritual growth and wellness opportunities

And most remarkably

it includes a dream of devoting 25% of our budget

to our outreach ministries

to reach out to those living on the margins of society

and to heal those broken by life circumstances

through ministries like St. Francis House,

and Saint Mark's Food Pantry and others.

And just to give you an idea

of how your generosity could impact the world

and actually change lives

I asked St. Francis House and the Food Pantry

what \$100,000 additional funding for each could do.

Deacon Len said

with that kind of money

they could serve at least 10,000 more people.

Saint Mark's,

You could an instrument of God's grace

to 10,000 people.

Imagine how God might use that grace

to change lives.

The Food Pantry could use running water over at the Scout Hut

They're cramped for space.

David Mann said they could buy more food

And install water.

Serious consideration he said

Should be given to a new building

A permanent home for the pantry

And other outreach ministries.

Volunteers at the pantry currently offer blood pressure checks,

consultations with volunteers

about Medicare/Medicaid benefits,

and spiritual counseling (if desired).

With more space and money

they could offer more services.

Imagine how God's grace

could change even more lives.

One other thing the survey revealed

And its not a judgment

its just a fact.

St. Mark's giving

averages 1.79 % per household.

And compared with 1200 other churches

who've taken the same survey

St. Mark's giving is at 33rd percentile.

which gives us an amazing opportunity

to do God's work

For just 1% more of annual from every household

Our giving could go to 2.79%

and every dream in that dream budget

could become a reality.

Because 1% more of our annual income

would produce for God's kingdom

over \$600,000

Imagine what God

could do with that?

Every week

God touches live with bread and wine

Imagine with God's power behind it

the power of 1%.