

God's RSVP

Luke 14:16-24 (New King James Version)

¹⁶ Then He said to him, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, ¹⁷ and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' ¹⁸ But they all with one *accord* began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' ¹⁹ And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' ²⁰ Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' ²¹ So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here *the* poor and *the* maimed and *the* lame and *the* blind.' ²² And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' ²³ Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled. ²⁴ For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.'"

The parable of the supper or wedding feast is so modern it just jumps out at you. All the decent religious folk you might expect would reply to God's invitation to the banquet and come along, one by one make their hollow excuses. They do so because they do not truly seek spiritual things, the affairs of God. They are enticed, satiated and then dulled by their worldly delights, (the field as an investment), the five yoke of oxen, (representing the clamour of the 5 senses and their inability to give God his rightful and first place, (I have married a wife). St. Gregory the Great further remarks that spiritual things are distasteful on first presentation but on partaking delight and lead to greater hunger for God whereas worldly delights attract strongly and then fail to satisfy. Nonetheless there is a kind of addiction in pursuing worldly concerns for man feels that if only he could get just enough he would never want again. In fact, there is an infinite desire planted in humans, but this is for God and God alone and any attempt to substitute worldly and finite things for the heavenly and infinite life of God always leads to bondage and despair. The sad thing is that the people who make excuses for not seeking after God and his righteousness truly believe that God is bought off and satisfied with their pretty little apparently (to them) plausible speeches.

They have perhaps so convinced themselves of the rightness of their choice they think strangely that even God would have to agree. In this, they place themselves in charge of their lives instead of God.

We should notice a few other often neglected details of this parable. Firstly, it is a supper to which the guests are invited, not a dinner. This is significant. The Bridegroom, that is Christ, comes at night ... not in the middle of the day. The supper is the last meal of the day. There is no meal after that. This is the final chance to sit down and eat with the Saviour. We know not when our final meal invitation will come. Woe betides us if we build and fill our barns and have no thought for either the morrow or God. If we come not in now and dine we may be forever excluded BY OUR OWN CHOICE. The invitation is pressing and urgent. We dare not prevaricate, delay, justify our inaction. We must rise immediately and bring our wedding garment, our faith, to the supper and sit down and eat.

Finally, a strange word in the invitation the Master of the supper (God) gives to those on the highways and lonely places after the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind have come in. He instructs, "*compel*" them to come in. Now, he could have compelled those who rejected the invitation but they had already decided against. We must assume that those well outside the Master's house would not have dreamed of thinking that the invitation was meant for them ... but it was ... so these can be fruitfully compelled because they have always wanted to come in, but have been kept away sometimes by those who falsely think that they have first place at the feast even if they never take up that place. The fruit of such humility in the dispossessed is a great joy in acceptance by God. The fruit of wilful arrogance in rejecting the invitation is to be cast out. My, the surprise on the faces of the proud as the humbler pass them going out on their way in!

The Church has to be like this ... the Church above all societies in welcoming the outcasts, the sinners, those who are accused by others and themselves. To such belong the Kingdom of God and the marriage Supper of the Lamb. The whole of

Christ's ministry in reaching out to humble sinners confirms this. He never turns anyone away who comes to him but with his Father's heart joyfully welcome all those who will come back home and feast.

This attitude of Christ toward the humble sinner must, in the first instance, be how we see ourselves responding to his invitation ... not with excuses, pride or indifference but with a deep sense of gratitude that we are loved and accepted as repentant sinners, knowing precisely and honestly in our hearts that we have no RIGHT to be here but rather we dine on Christ's love by the grace of God alone.

Next we must maintain this attitude in respect of others who especially in the eyes of the world do not merit being here. There is, indeed, NO moral merit in entering the Kingdom of God ... there is only repentance as the key. Beyond that, following Christ is the fruit of the indwelling Spirit, not a righteousness of our own still, but rather the work of God in us as respond to Him daily.

So the supper invitation lies on the table right here and now. It will remain here until we pick it up and reply. There will then be given to us a veritable pack of invites ... to go out and compel them to come in. We have a lot of work to do; God's work." Let's go to it!