

The Second Sunday after Trinity
26 June, Anno Domini 2022
St. Luke 14:15-24

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Dear elect children of the Lord,

"Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God." That's true. Everyone who eats bread in God's kingdom certainly is blessed. But what is this kingdom? Where is it? What is this bread and who will eat it? And the most important question for each of us, "Will I eat bread in God's kingdom?"

Let Jesus' parable today be a reminder that God isn't a unitarian universalist. Not everyone is going to be in the kingdom of heaven and the reason they won't is because they refused God's invitation. God certainly loves everyone. "Jesus Himself says "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16) Absolutely no one is excluded in the phrase "the world". But the world certainly does not love God. They have other priorities, other things that were more important or urgent in their minds. They desire a different kingdom with a different king and so they turn up their noses at the invitation.

So what is God's kingdom? We hear about it a lot and every day we pray that it would come. What are we praying for? We can actually speak of God's two kingdoms. His first kingdom is typically called His kingdom of power. In this kingdom He sustains the heavens and the earth, the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. In this kingdom, the rain falls, the sun rises, and daily bread is given to righteous and unrighteous alike. In this kingdom we can speak about God being everywhere. All people are equally a part of this kingdom, whether they want to be or not. They can't escape it or change it. Whether or not they believe that the Triune God is God, they are His subjects because they are part of creation. Our invitation into this kingdom was our conception and birth. We all eat bread in this kingdom. And we are certainly blessed because we don't even deserve the bread that perishes. We deserve to be hungry. We deserve to live lives of sorrow and misery and hardship and toil. We are the ones responsible for those things. The devil may stir things up but we are the ones putting our hands to the plow - cursing and stealing and wasting and lying and being lazy and selfish. We don't even deserve to exist in this kingdom because of our constant rebellion and our constant

attempts to unseat God from His throne. We try to order our existence according to our own foolishness. God gives life and good and we do all in our power to create chaos and death. And every day, everywhere we look, we see the pain, chaos, and heartache that our rebellion (or as we affectionately like to call it, our wisdom) brings. Families ripped apart. Children confused and alone. Researchers and scientists creating and destroying life because they can. Churches empty and broke. Politicians clamoring to see who can gain more power and spend others' money faster. Just look at the insane rage of many who are so desperate to be able to murder children in the womb. If I can't snuff out life I will burn and destroy and threaten other life. And yet, for all our rebellion and all our trying, Almighty God still rules in the kingdom of power and shapes and moves all things according to His good and gracious will. He is even able to use men's rebellion to serve His purposes. Thankfully, this week, countless numbers of the weakest and most vulnerable among us have been granted a reprieve. Let us now, in joyful thanksgiving rise up and do all in our power to be hands of God to mothers who, for whatever reason, feel they cannot take care of their unborn children. Let us reach out in love and compassion and mercy to encourage and support them so that they do not have to be afraid or alone. Let there be loud shouts of thanksgiving for the good God has worked in our land.

Now let's get back to the two kingdoms. Nothing about the kingdom of power, which we were just looking at, saves us. In fact, it only condemns us. To know that there is a God, only brings terror because we don't know how that God is disposed toward us, what He thinks of us. Is He like the God worshiped by the Muslims or the gods of the Greeks and Romans? Does He favor the ones who are good and punish the ones who do bad? Is He selfish? Does He take pleasure in our suffering? Does He care anything about us or are we just toys to amuse Him? And even if He is loving, how can I know that He actually loves me? After all, I know things about me. I know the things I've thought and done when no one was looking. I know how selfish and unloving I've been. The only thing we learn about God from the kingdom of power is that he is God and we aren't.

And that is why, thanks be to God, there is the second kingdom, the kingdom of grace, the kingdom of which our Lord speaks today. It is the kingdom where God rules in mercy and forgiveness. In this kingdom God reveals His true nature as the God who not only created me, out of love and mercy, but loves me and doesn't want to see this poor, miserable sinner dead, even though I have rebelled against His love and graciousness. In this kingdom sinners get what they don't deserve, rebels are freely pardoned, and the guilt is laid on the innocent. This is the kingdom that Jesus is teaching about in today's Gospel. Like the kingdom of

power, the kingdom of grace is available to all people. The Blood of Jesus was poured out for the sins of all people - those who are near and those who are far off. But, unlike the kingdom of power, not all people ARE in the kingdom of grace. It is a kingdom to which there is an invitation, but as Jesus taught us, the invitation can be refused - and many do. Look around. How many have been invited and didn't come? Every car that sees the sign outside, sees that God is gathering His people to give us life and salvation this very hour, and yet drive on by, are refusing the invitation. How many of yours friends and neighbors have you shared the good news of salvation with and they were less than interested or at best gave their passing agreement? How many have you invited to join you here in the Lord's house to hear the Gospel and they have made excuse after excuse why they couldn't come? How often have we done the same? How often have our hearts refused to be comforted by the promise of God's love and deliverance? How often have we grown bored and disinterested in God and His Word so that we neither read it nor hear it nor find peace and comfort in it? How often have we tried to find peace within ourselves, in our doing more, trying harder, and getting better rather than in the Son of God who paid our full redemption price with His life and washed us in the waters of Holy Baptism? Even we who have tasted the rich feast Wisdom has laid before us in Holy Scripture, find our hearts burdened and weighed down by the cares and concerns of this world. How often have we despaired of the invitation, believing that God didn't really mean it, that He hasn't fully and completely taken away my sin and granted me a seat at His table?

To you The Lord sends out His messengers to invite you to this kingdom again today. He invites you to lay aside YOUR works, which cannot save you, and to find comfort in HIS works, which are all meant to save you. He invites you to set aside the things of this fading, corrupting, decaying sinful world and to feast on the rich food He has prepared for you. The invitation into God's kingdom of righteousness is not a warm feeling in your heart nor is it issued on your terms nor is the arrangement of the kingdom left up to your personal design. The invitation into the kingdom of God is the preaching, the proclamation, that God saves sinners. It is the invitation to humble yourself before God and be pardoned through the Office of the Keys. It is a kingdom that looks utterly foolish to world because it reserves no power or glory for man. It raises sinners from death through water and the Word. It calls us to lives of sacrifice and service. It is sustained through hearing of the Gospel and the food of Christ's own Body and Blood. It is the unbelievable message that God has used His divine power to save the very people who rejected His rule and power. In the kingdom of grace, Jesus is condemned and you are set free, God dies and you live. In the kingdom of grace God does all the work and you receive all the benefits. In this kingdom you don't

sweat and toil for your bread. Instead, Jesus sweats great drops of His Blood and suffers through the agony of divine judgment and hell's fury to work off the price of your sin.

Where is this kingdom where God loves and forgives sins? Where is this kingdom where God offers life and salvation to fools like me? Well, you won't find it on a map and you certainly won't find it in your heart. The kingdom of God is in Jesus. If we desire the true wisdom and understanding, if we long to know that our sins won't be held against us, if we desire refuge from Satan's relentless accusations and assaults then look to Jesus, the Son of God. He became like you, shared in your sufferings and temptations, and conquered sin, death, and the devil by dying and rising again. In Jesus alone will you find the peace your soul longs for. In your darkest hour, in the deepest throws of hopelessness and sadness, the crucified Jesus stands as a beacon, assuring you that there is nothing in heaven or on earth that can separate you from His love.

Jesus is the true Bread sent from heaven. He satisfies hungry and hurting souls. All who have tasted and seen the goodness of God in Jesus will lose their taste for the empty, poisonous things of this world. And while this kingdom is a kingdom of faith that cannot be seen, God has set up signs so that you know where it can be found. Wherever Jesus Christ and Him crucified for you is preached, there is the kingdom of grace, there is Jesus forgiving sins and feeding hungry souls. Wherever Baptism is proclaimed and administered as the washing of regeneration and renewal, there is Jesus, extending His kingdom and drawing sinners to Himself. Wherever the Holy Supper is proclaimed as the true Body and Blood of Jesus, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins, there is Jesus, feeding and strengthening His people. There and there alone will you find the kingdom of grace - where the Lord who rules over heaven and earth, saves you. That is exactly what you will find here and in our sister congregations spread across the earth - the gracious King spreading His mercy and grace to all who desire it.

And how can you be sure that YOU are in this kingdom? Certainly don't look inside yourself. Don't look at how good you haven't been. Don't look at how full your bank account is or isn't. Look to Jesus. He is the one who brings you into His kingdom. He is the one who has died for you. He is the one who forgives all your sins. He is the one who washes away your guilt in the waters of Holy Baptism. He is the one who through this humble mouth and others like it, absolves you. He is the one who places His Body and Blood into your mouth. He sends out the invitation, as He has done again today, and He desires to have you in kingdom.

You, like all the elect, are in this kingdom solely on account of the gracious work of God, work which you do not need to doubt. He desired your salvation and brought it about. If you are not certain about whether or not you are among the elect, run back to your Baptism and believe what God there promised you. Holy Baptism is given to you that you may be certain. Do not doubt it. Do not doubt the promises of God. Believe that Jesus died for you and that He is the source and seal of your salvation. By your Baptism into Jesus' death, you were not only invited into the kingdom of grace but given a seat as a child.

May God grant us grace to heed this invitation, to lay aside every distraction and obligation that would keep our hearts from the feast of faith, and keep us in His kingdom which has no end.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keeps your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.