

✠ Luke 14:15-24 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

Everything is prepared. There is nothing left to do. Wisdom has set her table with food prepared on the cross and with wine poured from her Master's side. She has sent forth her preachers to call out of the dark streets of sin and shame, guilt and despair all who are led astray. "Come, eat of my bread and drink the wine I have prepared. Leave your simple ways and live. Come, walk in the way of the knowledge of the Holy One." Everything has been prepared. There is nothing left to do. You are invited to be a guest at God's banquet, and God Himself serves you.

Instead of filling out those pew cards and checking "member," we should all check "guest". We should all sign our names in the guest registry out in the narthex. For here we are God's guests. It is His Word that is read and preached. It is His praise that is sung. It is His Table that is set. It is His heavenly food that is served by Him. That is why this is called the Divine Service. It is God's service to us. He is the server, we are the recipients. And we ought to be thankful that He has invited us and gladly take everything He offers.

It's a humbling thing to be a guest. Better to be a member. A member has rights and privileges. A member is consulted when the organization he is a member of wants to do something. He can vote yea or nay according to his whim and fancy. And he doesn't need any other reason to vote one way or another except that it is his right to vote however he wants. But a guest has no rights. A guest cannot tell the host, the Master of the house, what to serve and what not to serve nor whom to serve. If the host wants to serve only liver and onions to some of his guests and only sushi to others, then that is what the guests will eat. If the Master of the feast wants His guests to sit on the floor or to stand in the courtyard, then that is how it will be. If He wants His guests to eat at midnight, then dinner will be served at midnight. And if the Master of the banquet wants His guests to hear a long boring speech from one of the Master's servants, then they will sit and listen. A guest can dictate nothing to the host because a guest has no rights in the house of another. And that offends us.

Prideful and conceited men make for lousy guests. Either they show up and constantly complain about how things are run, or they don't show up and constantly complain about how things are done. They carry about them an air of pomposity, thinking that the host and other guests are privileged that they came and should listen to how they would do things. They believe their presence makes the whole affair a better affair. And in the courts of kings, their heads are removed from their bodies. Repent, you are God's guest.

Everything has been prepared without consulting you. Everything has been set in order without running it by you. God did not take counsel from you before He sent His Son to be born of Mary, to die for your sins. He did not reason with you about the most expedient way to offer men His salvation or which men to choose as apostles and which to not. You are not a member of some great Voter's Assembly in the sky, deciding how God's kingdom, God's House, is run. You are a guest of the King. And in the King's court, things are done the King's way.

And so men offer up their excuses why they don't come to God's house. They don't come right out and say that they don't want to come, that they think themselves above all this faith nonsense. Instead they invent excuses as to why they can't come, at least not yet. Poor babies. This is their only day to sleep in or to play golf or go fishing. Or they are simply too busy. They just bought a field that needs tending. They just got some new cattle that need to be inspected. They have just been married. Their kids need to play sports. Or they think church

boring and they don't want to be bored so they stay at home and mow their lawns and trim their hedges. Or even worse, they think that church will always be there, so why not skip a few Sundays? What harm will it do? They can always go later. God's their friend, He'll understand. He knows that the important thing is not whether or not they attend His banquet, but whether or not they got the important stuff done. As if attending God's banquet is not the most important thing to do compared to the things of this life. One wonders what they think the purpose of gathering together is if it is not to be served by the Lord. Everyone thinks they have a special relationship with God. That they know where God stands and He knows where they stand. That He "gets" them. That their sins aren't bad enough to punish and that their excuses are good enough to skate by, sufficiently covering their pet sins and selfish living.

Reprove a scoffer and he will hate you. Should they be corrected, their folly pointed out to them, that the hearing of God's Word and the Sacrament are important enough to sacrifice everything for, to attend daily, not to mention weekly, then they snarl and snap like a frightened dog. And the more they are corrected, the louder they howl. They shout foul, that no one can tell them how to be a Christian or how or what church is supposed to be or look like. That they don't need to hear God's Word from a preacher, they can read it for themselves in the comfort of their own home, even though they don't. They'll come when they are good and ready and if they want to. And no one can convince them otherwise. Poor fools. Their excuses are paper thin and hold no water. The Master of the feast will reject them and extend His invitation to others so that their place will be taken and their portion given to another.

But with the Lord there is forgiveness that He may be feared. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, and all those who practice it have a good understanding. If those invited guests had feared the Master of the feast, they would not have made excuses as to why they couldn't come. They would have come running, forcing their way into the kingdom of God.

If you find your mind racing to your defense, repent. For the only reason to be defensive is if you are trying to save face before men, to justify yourself. God knows your heart. What do the opinions of men matter? He knows if you desire to be here and receive His gifts, or if you loathe the sound of His Word and the taste of His body and blood; if you think this only so important but not the most important thing. Or if you simply do not care one way or the other. Do not feel you must defend yourself against me or any other sinner. It is God who is your judge.

And if these words stroke your ego, that you never miss a service, or try not to, repent. For the only reason to feel pride is if you have accomplished something. But you have accomplished nothing. You are not here of your own accord but because God has called you by His Gospel. It is by His grace that you believe His Word and attend His preaching and Holy Supper. Do not think that you being a good guest merits you being invited. For you were not always among those called God's people. You are a foreigner. You are one found along the highways and byways. You have benefited from another's pride and rejection of the invitation. Do not then presume that you are here by right. Such thoughts prove that you are not wearing the proper attire of humility and repentance. And those found among the guests who are not dressed in the proper attire will be removed.

To be a guest is a great privilege and blessing. It is a joyous thing. It is God Himself who invites you; it He who serves you. Rejoice, therefore, for if He does not serve you, you have no part in Him. He has prepared the sacrifice. He has killed the fattened calf. He has made ready the food and drink and has set all things in order. There is nothing left to be done. You can't set the table for Him; Jesus has done so with His body and blood. You can't serve the guests for Him; it is Jesus who washes your feet with His Holy Word. You can't pretend to help, God has

done it all. It is finished. The banquet is prepared. All is ready. Come, be a good guest. Eat what is given. Hear what is spoken. Listen to what is said. Obey the Master in His house and He will forever keep you, making you His sons.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠