

“Invitation To The Feast Of Joy And Peace”

(Philippians 4:4-8; Isaiah 25:1-9; Matthew 22:1-14)

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

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

We need to be reminded of this, because we live in very troubling days, especially the COVID-19 pandemic causing so much harm and pain and uncertainty.

Paul knew that the source of true joy and peace, is not just the absence of trouble, but the living presence of Jesus in the heart of the believer. He is referring also to the feast God would prepare, that Isaiah prophesied [Isaiah 25:6]:

“On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines.”

Unfortunately so many people reject or decline the invitation God graciously issues to all people, the invitation to come and feast on the grace he has prepared in his Son Jesus Christ.

That kind of sums up also today’s Gospel parable. God’s invitation, then, as now, tends to be greeted with **apathy**, even with a **scornful** indifference. You’d think that God was inviting us to a flogging, or hard labour!

The tragedy is that so many Christians, those who through Baptism have been invited to feast on life, the abundant life, to enjoy the riches made available through the suffering and death of Christ, and offered us in worship in Word and Sacrament, decline the invitation.

Do we tend to react like king David did: ***“I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD.’”*** [Ps 122:1]

Or do we see the gospel Invitation as a burden? A burden that we are forced to carry because we think it is the right thing to do?

There are many who do see Christianity as a burden, and don’t understand that Christ liberates, and that being a member of God’s kingdom - of God’s church, is like being guests at a wedding banquet and not slaves in a labour camp.

So many people’s understanding of the Christian faith and life, is that it’s a series of do’s and don’ts that are designed to get them to heaven.

But this is to miss out on the fullness of the Christian life, a life, that while not free from troubles, is rich and deep and full of peace, that peace which Paul calls "***the peace which transcends all understanding***".

The call to believe in Jesus Christ, to be a Christian, is like being invited to a wedding feast, a feast in honour of God's Son, and paid for by the suffering, death and resurrection of God's Son. What's more, not only is the feast laid out for us, but the king also provides the proper clothing, the wedding garments, for the guests.

[In biblical weddings, banqueting clothes were normally provided for the guests].

The banqueting Clothes are a gift from God- the gift of **faith**:

"I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness." Isaiah 61:10

"All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Galatians 3:27

We have been invited to this feast. Do we have the **BANQUETING CLOTHES** we need? And what exactly are they?

Isaiah 66:2b gives us a clue: "***This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.***"

In a word it's **REPENTANCE!**

Paul in his letter to the Philippians, explains how we can enjoy the banquet to which we have been invited.

1. Rejoice in the Lord Paul says and then
2. he reminds us that Christ is near.

Matt 4:17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, "***Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.***"

REJOICE IN THE LORD. I WILL SAY IT AGAIN: REJOICE!

Knowing that God is near, Paul then goes on and says:

"DON'T BE ANXIOUS BUT IN EVERYTHING BY PRAYER AND PETITION, WITH THANKSGIVING LET YOUR REQUESTS BE MADE KNOWN TO HIM."

The Christian life is not a problem free life, bad things still happen!

But be sure of this - **God is near to us!** And while He may not prevent those bad things from happening, **he can, and he will, and he does, help us through them.**

But we need to ask! For it is in asking, in prayer, that we allow his presence to lift us up.

God is near! Tell Him about your joys and concerns, make your requests known to him, and then thank him, as you would thank a friend, for listening to you.

When we swallow our pride! When we rejoice in the Lord's presence! When we present our requests to him with thanksgiving, it is then that the Peace of God, that peace which **transcends all understanding**, will fill us, and will keep our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.

3. Finally Paul says that we set our minds on the good things that God offers!

This is the guarantee we have: "***I will never leave you or forsake you.***"

And this is the promise: "***Call on me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you.***"

Make it a habit to look for and make use of the good things God offers. You will then understand what rejoicing in the Lord is all about.

The final thing Paul recommends is this and I quote:

"whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or whatever you have seen in me put it into practice and the God of peace will be with you."

Put into practice what you have seen and heard, like Paul's: Prayer life, and Letting the Holy Spirit convince him of God's presence.

The **Christian life** is much like our physical life – we need food and drink and rest, not just once or every now and then, but on a regular and continuous basis! This is also essential for a healthy spiritual life! We are urged to nourish this life:

"Do not put out the Spirit's fire" [1 Thessalonians 5:19] by neglecting the means of grace!

And we are urged to continue to: "***be filled with the Spirit.***" [Ephesians 5:18]

By coming to God with **humble and contrite spirits**:

- rejoicing in the presence of God,
- praying and offering thanksgiving to our God,
- rejoicing in the good things he provides us at the banqueting table of his grace in Word and Sacrament-

We will discover for ourselves the joy of the new life that is ours,

- a life that is more than do's and don'ts,
- a life that has the joy of fellowship with God in it,
- a life that will shine and give comfort and joy to others,

Rejoice in the Lord always - again I say – Rejoice!.

Amen.

The peace and love of God which passes all human understanding, keep our heart and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Sermon by Pastor John Simboras 11 October 2020