

## **20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost October 15 2023**

### **Isaiah 25:1-9; Psalm 23; Matthew 22:1-14**

What has been your favorite meal that you have ever had? Not the food, but the meal. Was it a quiet dinner for two in a cozy café? Hot dogs with your family at the ballpark? A plate of BBQ with hundreds of others around you at the state fair? Was it cold cut sandwiches, homemade salads, and desserts as you laughed and cried at stories of the loved one you just buried? Was it that first sip of homemade soup when you are hungry?

Food is essential for our lives. Both physically- we literally cannot operate without that fuel. But also mentally and, I would argue, spiritually. And in that sense, it is not necessarily about the food that we have, but the communion with those around the table. The fellowship, connection, that comes from what really is an intimate act. To eat together. When we feed another at our table, sharing our daily bread, there is no more sacred thing than that. For in a very real, if not immediate, way we have saved their life. By feeding them. We have connected with them, deeply.

Meals, especially with others- that communion- happen at all kinds of times. Both in celebration and in sorrow. In times of joy and times of despair.

I remember watching *Band of Brothers* which follows Easy Company of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne during WWII, and being moved by the scene of Easy Company medic Eugene Roe and a Belgian nurse named Renee sharing a chocolate bar together in the snow, in the midst of the siege of Bastogne- surrounded by destruction and chaos, having witnessed and aided many

horribly wounded soldiers and civilians. They shared a simple meal. An island of peace, calm, companionship amid chaos. A feast of hope and promise amid destruction.

Entirely appropriate given the images of feasts we have today in our readings.

The reading from Isaiah and Psalm 23 both give us a different viewpoint on our world. A different view of what is going on and what it means to us now, and ultimately. A viewpoint that we are moved into by God's Word.

Isaiah chapter 25 is a song. One sung to God in the midst of tribulation and struggle. Not only the Israelites, but the nations have been brought low. All nations are covered by the shroud of death. Living under its tyranny. A threat to all.

In the midst of this reality Isaiah speaks the truth of who God is, who we are, and orients us to our world differently. God is not indifferent. Terrible. Harsh. Rather, God is the one who is refuge of the poor, comfort of the needy in their distress, a shelter from storm and heat. God is the one who calls all nations to a banquet. A feast of rich food and wine. A meal where God wipes away the tears from all faces. Tears of pain, frustration, sorrow, hopelessness. Wiped away by the loving hand of God. And while we feast on rich food and clear wine, God swallows up death forever. Freeing us from its tyranny.

The psalmist also speaks of a time of trouble. Walking through a valley overshadowed by death. Enemies on all sides. And of a feast. A table set before us in the presence of those who would hunt us down to do us harm.

A table filled to overflowing. Water so deep it is still as glass. Grass so green and lush it wraps around our body in a warm embrace. Peace in the midst of turmoil.

We are living in turbulent times. The images and stories coming out of Israel in the wake of the attack by Hamas are horrifying. Literally, incredible. The destruction that has come and will come from the Israeli response is also devastating. But it is not just there. Or in the horrors of war in Ukraine, Yemen, Syria, Sudan.

It is also here, amid the sometimes chaos of our lives. Where what had once seemed stable has now broken loose from the moorings. Injury, disease, death visit us, or our loved ones and friends. A world that can sometimes seem to be only concerned with depriving us of things. Where the object seems to be to grab as much as you can from others so that you might never run out. Where we huddle in our tribes seeking to prevent a ubiquitous “them” from ruining things. Where ultimately, we run from the tyranny of death.

And it is this mentality, this idea of scarcity that God has worked over the millennia to counteract with this image of the feast. That in good times and bad, there will be enough for us. That God’s desire is not destruction, death, tumult, but rather good food, good wine, and good fellowship.

This is manna in the wilderness. Where when we trust that God will provide daily bread for us. Enough for our needs. There winds up being enough for all. What would happen if we all just took enough and left the rest? Can we join in God’s reality and imagine that might be possible? Can you imagine what a world like that might be like to live in?

God's feast is the promise that there is enough for all. Good food and fine wine.

God's promise is also that this is for everyone. Matthew reminds us that God makes the sun to shine and the rain to fall on good and bad alike. Isaiah reminds us that all nations- Palestine and Israel. Ukraine and Russia- are invited to the banquet table. Jesus says this feast is for good and bad alike. God prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies because they are invited to the table as well. Yes, even those people who just popped into your head right now. All are welcome at the table.

Because we are all the same. Created in the image of God. In need of saving from our blindness to seeing God at work in the world. Our sin of trusting that our wealth, our nationality, our political party, our race will save us. In need of being saved from the fundamental sin of believing that "they" are not like us. And around this feast of God, in the communion of this meal, we get to know one another and see that clearly.

Friends, part of what makes the actions of October 7 so horrifying is that someone was able to convince those humans bearing the image of God carrying the guns that it was okay to do those unspeakable things to other human beings who bear the image of God. And what is so unspeakably sad is that those same victimized human beings are at risk of doing the same thing to others.

The amazing, incredible reality of the Gospel- the good news- that Jesus brings is that everyone is invited to the feast. All are welcome at this table. And only here will we receive the food that will give us life that truly is life.

Not this awful facsimile that we hold before ourselves and say this is what life it like!

That food is Jesus. God's own beloved Son. Who came not to judge the world, but to save it- all of it- everyone in it.

For it is at this table, at almost every gathering, we hear Jesus' promise- this bread is my body. This wine is my blood. Common things made uncommon by God's promise and presence. So that when you come to this table, you receive not only food for your body, but food for your soul.

I was talking with my UD class about the differing understandings of communion within the Christian tradition. For some, this feast is a remembrance. That eating the bread and drinking the wine is a bit like having your late grandma's favorite dish at Thanksgiving. When you eat it, you remember her and all that she meant to you. Body sense memory.

But for us Christians who happen to be Lutheran, we take Jesus at his word. Our vision has been changed by our encounter with the risen Jesus and we see- differently. We trust Jesus' promise- This is my body. This is my blood. And we see it in this wine and crumbly bread. We receive it as we eat and drink. I don't know how it is, but I trust that it is true. That when we come to this banquet table, we receive the very real presence of Christ.

Because I have seen the transformation of believers who have received this meal. The beaming face of a single mother from my childhood. Your own faces. Hands held out boldly and shyly. With tears as you commune with your late spouse or child. Commune with all those who have eaten this meal all the way back to Jesus and the disciples and all the way

forward until we all sit around that great feast with all the heavenly host. For that is what we mean when we confess our belief in the communion of the saints. We sit at this table, together, with all believers living and dead.

This is a feast for all times and places. During war and peace. Surrounded by chaos and love. This is why I love communion at weddings and at funerals. Because we are reminded that these things are not done in isolation, but communion. Together. That we celebrate the promise of new life, the deep love and communion between two people, the start of something new and amazing, with all creation. That we mourn the death of a loved one surrounded by the great cloud of witnesses to the love of God in Jesus Christ who have gone before us. That we are not alone in our grief- but together.

A reminder that while we tarry here, we are citizens first and foremost of the reign of heaven. Where our worth comes from the God who made us, who in the waters of baptism claimed us, and who has called us into communion with one another. To go into the world with our vision restored. To see the image of God in all we meet and to treat them that way. To love God with all that we are and to love one another as God in Jesus has loved us.

This feast is for you. All of you. Come to this table of mercy and grace. Come to receive the very body and blood of Jesus. Come experience the communion of other human beings, just like you. Joyful and sad. Sinner and Saint. Where we are all one at God's holy feast.

