

FCCOE; Luke 5:27-39; Rev. T. Ziegenhals

“Feasting with the Bridegroom”

Introduction: Last Monday was the one year anniversary of the Millers, the marriage of my daughter Thais and her husband Luke. Thinking back upon that joyful event raised wonderful memories, from the presence of a great many family and friends, to a very meaningful worship service led by Jason, to a truly fun time of eating and drinking and dancing at the reception. Certainly, weddings are unique and wonderful times of celebration. So it’s worth noting that when the religious leaders continued to get fussed at Jesus for his eating and drinking habits, a wedding was the metaphor he used to describe what he was all about.

Jesus, as we’ve noted, spent a great deal of time eating and drinking with others around a table. If his mission was to call sinners to repentance, his mission strategy often involved a meal. At a meal, in a very experiential way, Jesus would reveal his grace, he would reveal the nature of the community he had come to form, and, as we’ll see this morning, he would reveal that with his arrival, the old had gone and the new had come. What is the new? Have we recognized it’s arrival and are we living in its reality?

I. “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”

A. At the meal Jesus shared with Levi and his friends, two issues, primarily, were raised. The first we looked at last week and it centered around the question the religions leaders asked the followers of Jesus: “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus, we saw, not only had the gall to call a despised, sinful tax collector to follow him and become one of his disciples, he also had the *chutzpa* (a good Yiddish word for nerve, or brashness) to go to Levi’s home and share a meal with all of Levi’s despicable and sinful friends. In sitting down at table with these folks, Jesus was both revealing his grace - that we don’t and can’t earn God’s favor but that he loves us even before we clean up our act - and that the nature of the community Jesus had come to form would consist of folks who would humbly come to know their need for repentance, and not the self-righteous who saw no need for a savior.

II. “Your disciples don’t fast and pray.”

A. As the conversation continued, a second issue was raised. We’re not exactly sure who raised it (who the “they” is), but it came in the form of an observation: “John’s disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking” In some ways, this was a good thing. That is, if a disciple was an apprentice who was learning to become like his rabbi, then, by eating and drinking, the disciples of Jesus were becoming just like him! Job well done! But this observation wasn’t meant as a compliment, I don’t think. Rather, Jesus didn’t seem to be teaching his followers basic spiritual practices. Not eating, or fasting, was the nub of the concern.

B. You see, in the Judaism of Jesus’ day, fasting was practiced as a way to look back, remembering and reflecting on Israel’s sin, and a way to look forward, calling upon God to come in mercy and liberate the nation. Devout Jews would fast and pray in this way at least twice a week. Why, then, aren’t your disciples taking part in this important activity, Jesus was asked. In response, Jesus in effect said: But what if God’s Messiah, God’s liberator, full of mercy, is here, right now, sitting at the table with the tax collectors? If that’s the case, then it’s time for feasting, not fasting.

C. To explain this reality, Jesus drew on the metaphor of a wedding feast. And the point is that while the groom is present, no one fasts. It's a time of great celebration and great joy (and I can assure you, none of Luke Miller's friends were fasting!). In using this wedding metaphor, Jesus employed the image Jews often used to describe the anticipated new age and the intimate relationship God would enjoy with his people.

For example: "As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you" (Isa. 62:5). "For your Maker is your husband—the LORD Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer" (Isa 54:5).

Significantly, John the Baptist applied the role of the groom to Jesus when some thought that John might be the long-awaited Messiah: "I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him. The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listen for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and is now complete" (Jn. 3:28-29). John, it seems, was celebrating the groom's arrival, even though his disciples, apparently (cf. Lk. 5:33) were having difficulty acknowledging this.

The way that Jesus loved the church is compared by Paul to the love a husband should have for his wife: "Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her . . ." (Eph. 5:25).

And the eventual return of Jesus, which will bring the coming of God's kingdom to completion, is also described in terms of a marriage celebration: "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. . . Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" (Rev. 19:7-9).

Therefore, a significant aspect of what Jesus is revealing when he is at the table, eating and drinking with many different kinds of people, is that he, the long-awaited rescuer and liberator, has come. He is the groom, the very presence of God with his people. The kingdom of God has begun to break into the kingdom of this world. The promise of God, going all the way back to Abraham (Ge. 12:1-3), to bring blessing to the world through a descendant of Abraham's "nation"—Israel—has been fulfilled. After the crucifixion—when the bridegroom would be taken from them—it would be appropriate to fast once again. In fact, Jesus included teaching on the subject in his Sermon on the Mount (Ma. 6:16-18). But it would be used as a way to learn to trust God to meet our needs, and to seek guidance and direction from the One who has already come (cf. Ac. 13:1-3).

III. The old has gone; the new has come.

A. As Jesus brought this conversation around the table to a conclusion, he closed with three brief parables which were to encourage his listeners to recognize this time of God's coming to them and to live in accordance with his presence. The first concerned trying to repair an old garment with a patch from a new one. That wouldn't work because the new garment would be ruined and it wouldn't match the old very well. The second concerned trying to pour new into old wineskins. When the wine ferments and expands, the old skins will be too brittle to hold it and will burst. Both the wine and the skins will be lost. The third concerned those who, upon drinking the old wine, enjoyed it so much that they refused to even try the new. They were stuck in the old ways of doing things.

B. In each of these parables, it's not that the old was bad; it's that the old, now that the new has come, is obsolete. The sacrificial system, the dietary regulations, the rite of circumcision, the various feast days, all once had their place as they all helped point people

to what God has promised to do through Israel. But now that the Redeemer, the Messiah, had come, what had been meant to point to him was no longer needed or appropriate. It had served its purpose.

Illustration: Remember the days of the typewriter? It's what every term and research paper was written on. If you were really lucky, you had an electric one with an extra, white ribbon that enabled you to back up and correct a spelling error. Of course, now we have laptops and printers and various software programs through which we can make all kinds of corrections and adjustments, and even do footnotes - automatically. I can hardly imagine going back and trying to prepare even just a three-page sermon using a typewriter, even an electric one. I'd probably pull my hair out! Or imagine going back to sending a letter using the pony express instead of email, or setting out for Seattle by canoe as Lewis and Clark did in May 1804, rather than by airplane, as Craig and Margot in May 2017. Imagine if the Hammons had tried to get to that wedding in WA by canoe. They would have missed not only the ceremony and the reception, but would probably still be paddling when the couple celebrated their first anniversary, assuming Craig's hip and Margot's back hadn't given out first!

C. So a typewriter, a pony, and a canoe aren't bad things; they've just served their purpose. To type and communicate and travel long distances well and easily, we now use things which have replaced them. The new that has arrived with the groom, the new we are to live within, is the very Kingdom of God. When Jesus spoke about repentance, it was to invite and enable people to come live within this wonderful new reality, which will never wear out or become obsolete. As the groom, the king, Jesus reveals what the life that is truly life is all about, what it looks like to live when the will of God begins to be done, "on earth as it is in heaven." Jesus not only reveals this but, as we'll celebrate next week, sends his Spirit to enable us to live it. And then he sends us on the grand adventure of mission, to reveal through us all that he has come to do.

So, in the wake of his Ascension, and as we anticipate the gift of his Spirit on Pentecost, let us join with those at table with Jesus and rejoice around our tables that he, the Lord, is King (#165). He is the long-anticipated bridegroom who has come to be intimately with us. He reigns over all, he holds the keys of life and death, and he is our glorious hope!