Our Sunday Readings

ISAIAH 25:6-10a
PSALM 23:1-6
PHILIPPIANS4:12-14,19-20
MATTHEW 22:1-14 (or 1-10)

Come to the Feast

ISAIAH 25:6-10a

Reading closely

1. What all will God do for people?
2. How will people respond?
3. What circumstances would make these promises especially meaningful?
4. How might people have felt about these promises?
5. When do you think people expected God to do these things?
6. What image or picture does this passage create in your mind?

Living the word

7. Which part of this passage means the most to you?
8. How do you expect God to act in your life?

THE FIRST READING

This mountain

At 750-785 meters above sea level, Jerusalem's elevation isn't especially high. However, in biblical times mountains represented proximity to God. Jerusalem, after becoming a city sacred to God's chosen people, is thus portrayed as being on a mountain. The terms Jerusalem and Mount Zion are often used interchangeably.

Fine dining

The mountain in this passage also represents God's kingdom. One day God will transform the holy city and from there, the whole earth. The passage is *eschatological*: it describes what things will be like in the final age (the *eschaton*).

Eating together was an important symbolic action for ancient people. A meal shared by different families, tribes, or leaders represented friendship and peace. God's promise includes an eternal meal or heavenly banquet. In this prophetic vision people from all over the world share this meal of peace.

Wiping away tears

God will help non-believers understand and embrace what he wants for the world (v.7). Once he does, there will be no more war, hatred, or division. God will end all that leads to death, including death itself.

God will also heal the confusion, pain, and grief of his chosen people, the Israelites, who had been conquered and scattered by foreign empires (v.8).

MATTHEW 22:1-14

Read vv. 1-7.

1. What might the king feel toward his son?
2. Do you think the feast is going to be good?
3. What all might the king expect of the people he invited?
4. How do you think the king feels about the first set of refusals?
5. How does the king try to persuade people to come?
6. Do you think anyone has a good reason for not coming?
7. What could prompt some of these invitees to become violent?
8. How does the king respond?

Read vv. 8-10.

9. Why does the king search for new guests?
10. What might the king expect now?
11. What all might the servants be thinking?
12. How are these guests unusual?
13. Why do you think these people show up?

Read vv. 11-14.

14. How should the guests behave?
15. Why do you think the man isn't wearing the proper clothes?
16. Why do you think the man doesn't answer?
17. What all might the wedding garment represent?
18. Why does the king throw the man out?
19. Does the king's response seem harsh?
20. To what has God invited you?
21. How well are you responding to God's invitation?

PRAYER

adapted from The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

Heavenly Father, you have called us out of darkness and into faith, hope, and love. Through the power of your Spirit we have become a new creation and have clothed ourselves in Christ.

Kindle in us a spirit of true repentance. Free us from the power of sin. Guide us along the path of holiness. Make us living proofs of your grace.

On the day of judgment, may we stand before you bearing fruits of holiness and love. We ask this in the name of Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

THE GOSPEL READING

New invitations

In the Bible banquets, especially wedding feasts, often represent eternal fellowship with God. Jesus uses this metaphor as he directs a third parable of judgment against the Jewish leaders. As they reject the next stage of salvation history that has begun with Jesus, God opens the banquet to others.

The allegorical interpretation

Kings don't typically pause wedding receptions in order to wage war. With verses 6-7 this passage becomes an allegory.

- The king is God
- The wedding feast is the heavenly banquet. The king's son is Jesus, who sits in the place of honor
- The first invitation represents God's call through the prophets of the Old Testament. The second invitation represents the efforts of Christian missionaries like the apostles.
- The first invitees are the Jewish leaders. The last-minute guests are Gentiles and other Jews
- The new guests represent the church
- The city the king attacks probably represents Jerusalem, destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. Some Christians believed God punished this city because its leaders rejected Jesus.

Dressing for the feast

The king's servants gather *the good and bad alike* (v.10). Now the focus shifts from the Jewish leaders to the church. Everyone is invited into God's church, but people must follow Jesus' teachings and example if they wish to remain there. Accepting God's invitation means more than merely showing up: we must also try to change into good people.

The man who isn't wearing a wedding garment represents those who haven't changed their way of life. When given the chance to explain why he isn't dressed appropriately, he gives no explanation.

The conclusion of the parable points ahead to the Last Judgment. We're given every possible chance to be included in God's kingdom. Jesus warns us not to throw those chances away.