

The Anticipatory Feast

Luke 22:7-20

Holy Thursday, 2016

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Isaiah prophecies about the future. He talks about a time when the Lord will swallow up death forever. When the Lord swallows up death forever, He will have a celebration. The celebration will be in His presence. At this celebration the Lord will serve the best of meats and the finest of wines. There will be none better. Isaiah prophecies that eternity is among other things a feast.

Our Lord adds to the prophecy of Isaiah. He also says that eternity is a feast. He says that eternity is a wedding feast. The Lord Himself is getting married in eternity. His bride is not some individual person such as what we would marry. The Lord does not marry some kind of goddess as is portrayed by the mythical pagan gods. In eternity the Lord marries His Church.

Wedding feasts are the best of feasts. They are certainly superior to funeral dinners. Funeral dinners allow mourners to grieve together over some good food. They are hastily prepared because there is no way to schedule a death. Even if a person is under hospice care and everyone knows that the death is coming, the family has no time to prepare an elaborate meal. They have more important things to do. Even after the death has occurred the family has important grieving to do. It will take time and energy. Others must do this for them. Our congregation is organized to prepare funeral dinners and lunches for grieving families at the time of the funeral. But when it happens people other than the family are preparing it. Funeral dinners are good, but they are modest.

Not so a wedding feasts. Weddings are scheduled months in advance, some of them years in advance, not that that is a good thing, but it is true. There is plenty of time for the family to plan not only the food, but the décor as well. Everything from what is on the walls to what is on the chairs comes under the family's scrutiny for decision. They plan the hors d'oeuvres and the center pieces. They plan the drinks and the open bar. They plan the menu and the seating arrangement. If the family is wealthy, they can plan a hefty meal with elaborate decorations to express their joy at the marriage of their daughter.

The other thing about a wedding feast is that it celebrates the future. A funeral dinner or lunch commemorates the past. It points backward to the times of joy that are past. The family does not want to forget them. They want to hang on to those good memories so that some part of the person that they lost is still with them. Ultimately they want the dead person back with them healthy and whole and that is what God promises in the resurrection, but that is not what funeral lunches are for.

Wedding feasts celebrate the future. That is why they are more joyful than funeral lunches. The assembled family and friends are celebrating what the future of the couple may be. They are celebrating what blessings God may bestow upon them in the future. They are celebrating the children that the couple may bear and raise. Grandparents see that the family is continuing in the marriage of their grandchildren. The same is true of parents. There is a future here that is bright and wonderful. There is a future here where the values of the Lord are passed down from one generation to the next. Faith in Jesus Christ continues one wedding after another as husbands and wives become fathers and mothers and teach their children about Jesus.

And so when Jesus returns it is not a funeral dinner, it is a wedding feast.

Jesus has been away from us for some time. He has been in heaven at the right hand of the Father for some time. Our groom has secured His engagement to us. He has promised to marry us, but we have not seen Him in some time. The joy of seeing Jesus is the joy of a bride who has not seen her fiancé in

some time. The joy of seeing Jesus is the joy of a wife seeing her husband return from deployment. The joy of seeing Jesus is the joy of people who have received His word from Him and in so doing have received Him, but want to receive Him in His fullness. When Jesus returns there will be intimate fellowship between Him and His Church. We look forward to Him expressing His love to us in person.

And there is a future. When Jesus returns there is a future between Him and us.

Even at human weddings death overshadows things. Many times brides and grooms will make notes in their service outlines of those in the family who have died. There are gaps at the tables at a wedding. There are people who should be there who are not there. They are commemorated at some weddings with lit candles at others with floral arrangements. And so while the future is celebrated at human weddings, even there the loss of the past is commemorated.

Not so at the wedding feast when Jesus returns. Everyone that He wanted there will be there. No seat will be empty. There will be no one to grieve or mourn. At the wedding feast of Jesus there is only the future all bright and glorious. At the wedding feast of Jesus there is no death. At the wedding feast of Jesus, not only are the decorations perfect and the meat and wine fine, there is only the future and so there is only joy.

We are not at that feast yet.

That feast does not begin until the Lord swallows up death forever. We have not reached the fulfillment of that prophecy. There is still death in our lives. We have lost others. We are on our way to being lost to others. We do not see Jesus yet. We are still plagued by the past. We are not yet caught up in the future. We are not at the feast yet.

And when our Lord institutes the Sacrament of the Altar He tells us that He will not eat of that Passover again until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God. He tells us that He will not drink of the fruit of the vine again until the Kingdom of God comes.

Our Lord is speaking about the visible coming of His kingdom. He is speaking about the day when it will be plain to all people that He is king and that they should have believed in Him. Jesus is talking about the day when it is also plain who believed in Him and who did not. Those who believe in Him are His kingdom. They live by faith in Him, but their faith is not seen now. It is hidden under flesh and sin and death. When Jesus returns the faith of those who have believed in Him will be visible. Everyone will see who it was who believed in Jesus. It is the day when He returns. On that day He will once again eat the Passover with us. On that day He will once again drink the fruit of the vine. Until that day comes He give us His body to eat and His blood to drink, but He does not eat or drink until He returns.

And since we are to celebrate the Sacrament of the Altar in memory of the one who said that He would not eat of the Passover until the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God, every time we eat the Sacrament of the Altar we do so in anticipation of the day when we will eat of the Passover with Jesus in the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God. Since we celebrate the Sacrament of the Altar in memory of the one who said that He would not drink of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God comes, we drink of the fruit of the vine ourselves in anticipation of the day when our Lord will drink it again with us.

The Sacrament of the Altar anticipates the feast that is to come. The Sacrament of the Altar looks forward to it. The Sacrament of the Altar looks forward to the return of our Lord Jesus Christ and the eternal joy that it will bring.

But even Pixar knows that joy and sadness go together in this life. It is only in the life to come that sadness will depart and only joy will remain.

The Passover that our Lord will once again eat with us in eternity is the Passover of God in Egypt. The Sacrament of the Altar is the Passover of God. It celebrates the redemption of the people out of Egypt. The old Passover that the Israelites celebrated in the Old Testament slaughtered a lamb and the people ate of its flesh. That was acceptable until the true Lamb of God came. Now that Jesus has come, He is the true Lamb of God. The lambs slaughtered in the Old Testament were only anticipatory of Him. Now that He has come, He is the true Lamb of God and they are not. The true Lamb of God is slaughtered. His blood is drained. We eat His flesh. Just like the people of the Old Testament ate the flesh of the Passover lamb so now in the Sacrament of the Altar we eat the Passover Lamb. Just as they were saved on the day they ate of the Passover lamb and put the blood on the doorframes of their homes so also we are saved on the day we eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood.

Such salvation is costly. The Lamb must be slaughtered. It must be done to atone for our sins. And it is done. And so the Sacrament of the Altar commemorates the death of our Lord. It is the Good Friday sacrament. We eat His sacrifice that He made for us. We eat His body and drink His blood. We do so with repentant hearts lest He condemn us rather than forgive us when we are eating His body and drinking His blood. And in so doing we are attached to the past. We are attached to the night in which He was betrayed and beyond that we are attached to the night that was different from any other night when Israel came out of Egypt.

And at the same time that it attaches us to the past the Sacrament of the Altar attaches us to the future. It anticipates the feast that is to come. At each celebration of the Sacrament of the Altar there is one that really should be eating along with us, but He is not. That is our Lord. Rather He is eaten by us in anticipation of the day when it will no longer be necessary to eat His body and drink His blood because the forgiveness of our sins that is given to us in the Sacrament of the Altar now will be manifested in our glory then. And then when forgiveness is no longer necessary Jesus will resume eating of the Passover and drinking of the fruit of the vine. He will do it. And He will do it together with us.

We eat and we drink and we look forward to that day.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.