

Title: An Invitation to a Great Feast

Subtitle: Filling your Life with Things that Satisfy

I am always learning new things about how modern gadgets work. A friend of mine, who happens to be an English teacher at a community college, was learning to use Siri, a voice-controlled personal assistant that can answer questions on her new iPhone. So she set the phone up so that all she had to do was say “Siri” for Siri to be activated.

A few days later, she addressed a class that tended to be slack about completing tasks on time. When she stressed the detrimental consequences to their grades if assignments were not completed by the appointed timeline, some students rolled their eyes as if to say, “We have heard that before!” So, to make herself perfectly clear, the teacher emphatically said, “I am **serious**!” Then suddenly, her phone woke up thinking that she was calling Siri, and verbally responded with a voice that said, **“Is that so?”** (I wish I could have been a fly on the wall to see the looks on the students’ faces.)

I think when Jesus gave us the “Bread of Life” discourse in our Gospel today, he, too, was “**serious**.” He repeatedly reiterated, ***“I am living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever.”***¹

There are many references to food in the Bible, which have both a literal and spiritual application. For example, earlier in John’s Gospel, Jesus said, **“I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”**² Later, in that same context, he said, ***“My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.”***³ Similarly, in our Gospel today, Jesus uses bread to refer

¹ John 6:51 (Repeated in verses 35, 48, and 50)

² John 4:32

³ John 4:34

to something that feeds and sustains us spiritually. Therefore, if we are to take his words “seriously,” we must find ways to assimilate his life and teaching into our own. And as Jesus used parables to help others understand these things, I, too, like stories that help us grasp the meaning of what he said.

The following is one such story. It comes to us from one of our larger churches, where multiple evening programs coincided. In the sanctuary, as the priest stood in front of the altar about to bless the bread and the wine for Holy Communion, the church’s large, heavy, red front doors cracked open. The evening sunlight streamed through as all the worshippers turned their heads, focusing on the person who propped the door with his foot, started down the aisle with a stack of steaming hot pepperoni pizza, and met the priest at the altar. The timing could not have been more appropriate (or inappropriate, depending on how you might view it) since he came in as the people were offering each other the sign of peace. So the priest graciously stopped and redirected him toward the auditorium where the youth group was meeting.

The officiating priest then took the interruption as a teachable moment and said, “Jesus has cracked the heavy door of heaven open and has come down the aisle to give himself for the life of the world.” The bread he offers is his flesh, which was broken and given so that we might feast on the riches of heaven.

Although those in the sanctuary that night didn’t get to eat it, the pizza made them think again about how the whole story of Jesus is about a timely, heavenly delivery. The priest clarified his point, saying, “It’s not take-out, nor is it simply a pick-up service. It’s God delivering ‘the living bread’ right where we live, even if, for some, it may seem like an interruption.” But such interruptions are good if they spur us to think in new ways.

I had a parishioner who once said to me, “I chose the Episcopal Church because I wanted a ‘lite’ version of Christianity.” Her statement implied that she chose our church because she believed it would be a place where everything would be easy and comfortable. But honestly, she was not realistic. Some aspects of the Christian faith are confusing and complex. Taking the teachings of Christ and assimilating them to the extent that they become part of how we live is never easy.

This dynamic is as true for us as it was for the Ephesians to whom Paul wrote in our New Testament lesson today. They were tempted to get sidetracked by all sorts of worldly diversions. Therefore, Paul moved the conversation from doctrine to duty and from exposition to cautious admonition when he wrote, *“Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”*⁴ They had temptations (as we all do) to heed worldly enticements, but resistance to such offers takes authentic spiritual strength, wisdom, and spiritual understanding.

The original word Paul used for “understanding” when he wrote about the will of the Lord was a compound word that implies *“a comprehensive putting together”*⁵ of God’s interwoven ways. In other words, there is a synthesis of godly principles that you must “set together” to have a balanced and healthy spiritual life. This kind of understanding is freely offered through an invitation in our Old Testament lesson, where the personification of wisdom plays host to a grand affair.

In an informal survey given at a mission conference, one of the questions posed was, *“What image do you have in mind*

⁴ Ephesians 5:15-16

⁵ Strong’s Concordance, #4920 suniémi, meaning: to set together, to understand

when you present the gospel of Jesus Christ to someone?” Of all the different answers that could have been given, the one most often given was the image of inviting people to a feast. Such an invitation is echoed in the Book of Proverbs, where Lady Wisdom has ***“built her house, slaughtered her beasts, mixed her wine, set her table, and sent out her young women to make the invitation known.”***⁶ Wisdom’s feast offers prudence, strength, riches, and honor, which stand in stark contrast to the pleasures presented by the personification of Lady Folly’s vanity fair. We must come, learn, listen, and partake in God’s wisdom to avoid reckless behaviors.

Last week, Bishop Bane challenged you to think about all the people, relationships, and experiences that have nourished and sustained your life. They represent the cast of characters that have played a part in hosting wisdom’s feast, for they have loved you and taught you something that fed your soul. Recognizing these people is so important that James asks, ***“Who is wise and understanding among you?”***⁷ He answers, ***“Look at their good conduct with deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.”***⁸ Such wisdom is ***“first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.”***⁹

These are the people with whom wisdom resides. And if we want to be like them, we must partake in this feast that Jesus so freely offers. So, let’s take his offer seriously. Amen.

⁶ Proverbs 9:2-3

⁷ James 3:13a

⁸ James 3:13b

⁹ James 3:17