



Liturgical Day: The 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Date: November 8, 2009

Sermon Title: A Feast of Rich Food

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In our family, we have a standard Sunday night ritual. It begins with Mom and Dad's desperate attempt to get the boys in bed by 9:00 p.m. Then, if things are settled down, we find ourselves on the couch, tuned into ABC's "Brothers & Sisters." I don't know why I like this show. I suppose a psychologist would tell me that it has something to do with the fact that Sally Field is one of the stars, and on some level I want to go back and be a child again, like I was when she was starring in *Gidget* or *The Flying Nun*. It is a strange show, mostly about a family that includes a widow, an uncle, and five grown children – along with a few other loosely related family members. What is strange, though, is that for three quarters of most shows, it seems that all they do is fight. It becomes most painful at family meals. Nora Walker, the character played by Sally Field, is constantly trying to pull her family together over a meal, and she seems to fail every time. Whenever they sit down around the table, it ends up in an intense shouting match, with at least two or three family members storming away from the table – and refusing to make up until a couple of scenes later, or a couple of episodes later.

Contrast that with this morning's first lesson. In it, we hear the description of a meal that is able to transform every diner (in a positive way, no less!). We hear of a feast of rich food. The writer describes a selection of well-aged wines. At this feast death is destroyed; tears are wiped away. Diners rejoice and are glad. Such is the recurring theme of the heavenly banquet table – one that is featured in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.

The writer, in this case, is the Prophet Isaiah – one of the most important figures in the entire Hebrew Bible. Isaiah's ministry took place during one of the most tumultuous times in the history of Ancient Israel. He began offering his prophetic utterances to the people around 740 BC or so, during the reign of King Ahaz of Judah (arguably one of the worst kings Israel ever experienced). He continued until about 700 BC, when Hezekiah was king of Judah. During his ministry, Assyria conquered the northern kingdom of Israel (in 722 BC) and the fortified cities of Judah (in 701 BC). Babylon eventually conquered the southern kingdom of Judah (in 597 BC).

Isaiah was mostly concerned that Israel and its leaders were behaving unfaithfully. More to the point, Israel was not depending on God for its security. For a time, they believed that an alliance with Syria would offer them the strongest hope for the future. Eventually, they decided that Egypt would be their best bet. But Isaiah was enraged by their lack of faith. He challenged them, telling them that if they trusted in these foreign powers instead of God, their countries would end up in destruction.

There are many words of judgment in Isaiah – but there are also words of grace. That is the case with this week's lesson. Isaiah speaks words of hope to his listeners. Isaiah proclaims that after their time of judgment is over, God will restore them. God will return them to their homeland. God will make good on the promise that was made generations earlier to their ancestor, Abraham. And being back home again will be like a feast of rich food, with a selection of well-aged wines. Death will be destroyed. Tears will be wiped away. Contrary to the image of dinner in the television Walkers' dining room, this image is one of peace and wholeness that held them up through the most difficult

years they faced as a nation. It is an image that gave them hope: hope in the power and promise of God. And as they considered this great banquet

LESSONS:

KINGS 17:8-16

PSALM 146 (8)

HEBREWS 9:24-28

ST. MARK 12:38-44

SEMICONTINUOUS SERIES

RUTH 3:1-5; 4:13-17

PSALM 127 (3)

THE BIBLE IN 90 DAYS  
READING

ISAIAH 25:6-9

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O GOD, YOU SHOW  
FORTH YOUR ALMIGHTY  
POWER CHIEFLY BY  
REACHING OUT TO US IN  
MERCY. GRANT US THE  
FULLNESS OF YOUR  
GRACE, STRENGTHEN  
OUR TRUST IN YOUR  
PROMISES, AND BRING  
ALL THE WORLD TO  
SHARE IN THE TREASURES  
THAT COME THROUGH  
YOUR SON, JESUS  
CHRIST, OUR SAVIOR  
AND LORD. AMEN.

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image from Isaiah, the people of God, living in captivity in a foreign land, imagined the day when all would be returned to the way it was supposed to be. When they would be restored once again.

The great heavenly banquet meal was a sign for Ancient Israel of the hope they had for a return to their past glory. The banquet means something entirely different to us today.

Our faith is also shaped by an image of the table of God. It isn't a great banquet table, with a feast of rich food and well-aged wines, at least not literally. But it is a table none-the-less. And when we come to the table, although our stomachs may not be filled, our hearts feast on the grace of God that we receive through our Lord in the bread and wine of this meal. What we do at this table stands at the very center of what it means to be a Christian. We come here, every one of us unworthy of what we are about to receive. We come here, aware of our sinfulness and our need to receive forgiveness from God. We come here, knowing that when we receive the bread and wine, we receive the real presence of our Lord. We come here, believing that this meal is one of the ways that God renews us, and feeds us, and strengthens us for whatever lies ahead.

The table around which we gather every Sunday is the heart of the relationship that God forms with us through Jesus Christ. Everything begins at this table. It begins with God's initiative. It begins with God's grace. We are accepted, fully and radically, at this table, to a meal that welcomes us into the amazing grace and love of our God. It all begins with God's love for us. A love that we never deserve. A love that we couldn't imagine earning. But a love that is ours, as a gift from God.

We all know, though (Don't we?), that it doesn't end there. Because God's love is only the beginning of our story of faith. It continues as we leave this table, renewed by God. It continues as we are sent from this place, into God's world, to be a reflection of Christ's love. It continues as we offer the rest of our lives back to God, in gratitude for what God has done for us. We are a thankful people – thankful for the grace that is ours in Christ. And we live out our gratitude by taking this good news with us into the world.

Now I realize that we have a number of guests with us this morning at worship. This next section of my sermon is not for you. You are welcome to listen in, of course, and if it's helpful, we'll be glad for that. But for the next couple of minutes I want to speak directly to the members and supporters of this particular congregation.

I probably don't need to remind you that today is Stewardship Sunday – the day when we make our financial commitments to support this congregation beginning next weekend, and through the coming year. A lot has been said and written lately about the bad economy that is plaguing us these days. It is said that these are hard times, especially for those who depend on investments for their income. It is also said that in hard times, charitable contributions diminish. Churches are not immune to those patterns, and the truth is: some churches are really struggling these days.

But faithful Christians march to the beat of a different drummer. We don't base our giving to the ministries of the church on how well the economy is sailing along, or what our own personal economic future might look like. No, instead, we base our giving on the grace of God. And we give in such a way that the strength of our giving correlates with the depth of our gratitude. We give in such a way that the amount we give is based on our desire to make God a priority in our lives.

That said, we also believe in proportionate giving. In times when we're making a lot of money, we give a lot more to God through the church. And in times when we're making less, we give less. But we don't scale our giving back because of something that might happen to us some day. Our giving is rooted in our gratitude – and it is an expression of how thankful we are to have a God who loves us so deeply.

So I encourage you to be grateful this morning, as you consider how you will give back to the God who has already given you so much. Let your support of this congregation be a measure of how God has blessed you. And know that as you do so, the resources you entrust to us will be put to good work, that through our ministries others might come to know the love of God that has called us here; that others might come to know the great feast of grace that has been prepared before us. Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (November 8, 2009)

**Gospel Lesson; English Text:** <sup>i</sup>

<sup>12.38</sup> As he taught, he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, <sup>39</sup> and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! <sup>40</sup> They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

<sup>41</sup> He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. <sup>42</sup> A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. <sup>43</sup> Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. <sup>44</sup> For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on." <sup>ii</sup>

**Gospel Lesson; Greek Text:**

<sup>12.38</sup> Καὶ ἐν τῇ διδαχῇ αὐτοῦ λεγεν· βλέπετε ἀπὸ τῶν γραμματέων τῶν θελόντων ἐν στολαῖς περιπατεῖν καὶ ἀσπασμοὺς ἐν ταῖς ἀγοραῖς <sup>39</sup>καὶ πρωτοκαθεδρίας ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς καὶ πρωτοκλισίας ἐν τοῖς δεῖπνοις, <sup>40</sup>οἱ κατεσθιοντες τὰς οἰκίας τῶν χηρῶν καὶ προφάσει μακρὰ προσευχόμενοι· οὗτοι λήμψονται περισσότερον κρίμα.

<sup>41</sup>Καὶ καθίσας κατέναντι τοῦ γαζοφυλακίου ἐθεώρει πῶς ὁ χλος βάλλει χαλκὸν εἰς τὸ γαζοφυλάκιον. καὶ πολλοὶ πλούσιοι βαλλον πολλά· <sup>42</sup>καὶ ἐλθοῦσα μία χήρα πτωχὴ ἔβαλεν λεπτὰ δύο, ὃ ἐστὶν κοδράντης. <sup>43</sup>καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν τι ἡ χήρα αατη ἢ πτωχὴ πλείον πάντων βαλεν τῶν βαλλόντων εἰς τὸ γαζοφυλάκιον· <sup>44</sup>πάντες γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ περισσεύοντος αὐτοῖς βαλον, αατη δὲ ἐκ τῆς ὑστερήσεως αὐτῆς πάντα σα εἶχεν βαλεν λον τὸν βιοναύτῆς. <sup>iii</sup>

**"The Bible in 90 Days" Lesson:**

<sup>25:6</sup> On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. <sup>7</sup> And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; <sup>8</sup> he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. <sup>9</sup> It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. <sup>iv</sup>

<sup>i</sup> A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at <http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/Lectionary.aspx>

<sup>ii</sup> St. Mark 12:38-44, New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

<sup>iii</sup> St. Mark 12:38-44, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).

<sup>iv</sup> Isaiah 25:6-9, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).

**Scheduled Readings for  
“The Bible in 90 Days”  
9/13/2009 - 12/12/2009**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Begin Reading At</u>	<u>Sermon Based On</u>
9/13	Genesis 1:1	Genesis 1:1-19
9/20	Leviticus 1:1	Exodus 16:2-15
9/27	Deuteronomy 23:12	Deuteronomy 6:1-9
10/4	1 Samuel 28:20	Joshua 24:1-3, 14-18
10/11	1 Chronicles 1:1	1 Kings 3:5-12
10/18	Nehemiah 13:15	Nehemiah 1:4-11a
10/25	Psalms 89:14	Job 38:1-11
11/1	Isaiah 14:1	Psalms 104:24-34, 35b
11/8	Jeremiah 33:23	Isaiah 25:6-9
11/15	Daniel 9:1	Ezekiel 2:1-5
11/22	Matthew 26:57	Micah 6:1-8
11/29	Acts 6:8	John 20:19-31
12/6	Hebrews 1:1	Romans 5:1-11