2nd Sunday after Trinity
Rolling Meadows - 1962

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Luke 14: 18 They all with one consent began to make excuse.

EXCUSES

People have a strange way of putting false values on things. The best things in life are often pushed aside as being unimportant, while other, lesser things are given top priority. Particularly is this true with a man's relation to his God. In today's Gospel Jesus tells a great story about people who missed out on the very best in life because they persisted in regarding it as unimportant. Listen again to the story, as the Lord Himself told it: "A certain man made a great supper, and bade many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come, for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.

The people invited to this banquet had better things to do, things more interesting and more attractive. They were willing to pass up the dinner, which appeared to them at the moment to be of little significance. They all with one consent began to make excuse. The result was that the invitation went out to people who would not so easily be disposed to regard it as inimportant - while those who had been originally invited were left to discover in their own way, and at their own expense, how mistaken they really were.

As usual in the ordinary stories He told about life, Jesus, the Son of God, was talking about His Father. God issues His invitation to men everywhere to become

His children by faith in Christ Jesus. God wants them for His own. But how do people treat God's invitation? All too often they put God off. "Later," they say, Right now we have something more important to do. It seems best to us to take care of this important matter right now, and we shall come around to your invitation later on." And they begin to make excuses. "I have married a wife, I have purchased a yoke of oxen, I have bought a field, I have to pick out my new car, I have to look at a piece of property I am thinking of purchasing, I have to go to the beach, I have to take care of the store, I have to clean up the yard, I have to play golf." In every case, the story is the same: "I would like to come, but I have something more important to do."

All of this strikes home, doesn't it? This Word of our Lord ought to drive us into deep and earnest self-examination. We certainly cannot be proud of our record as a congregation, when less than 1/4th of our membership is in the House of God on a given Sunday to worship to hear His Word and respond to His invitation: Come, for all things are now ready. If we were to go out today to confront those members of Trinity who are not here, what kind of a reception do you think we would receive? Without a doubt we would be buried with an avalanche of excuses.

There is an old statement to the effect that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. It might be truer to say that the road to hell is paved with excuses - not so much with malice and wickedness, but with innocent, harmless little things that crop up along the way. The road to hell is paved with Sunday dinners and fishing trips, with the Sunday newspaper and extra hours of sleep, with company and outings. The road to hell is paved with friends and work and play - in fact with everything that gets between a man and his God.

God often insists on breaking into our lives at the most imopportune times. He seeks to break down the great barriers separating us from Him. He intrudes when He invites. Often He has to break up the soul-destroying routine that envelops our lives. He does not wait until we are unoccupied with other concerns. His invitation does not read, "Please come, if you have time." This is the way it read: "Come, at

this moment, wherever you are and whatever you are doing. Drop everything and come. Come, for all things are now ready!"

God insists on being First. It is the nature of His invitation that He wants us to make a choice between Him and whatever else may come first in our lives -- between Him and the fishing trip, between Him and the roast beef, between Him and the new house, between Him and whatever it may be, however important or unimportant. God demands the fire, ambition, and energy of youth, given whole-heartedly to Him in faith and service, so that old age may be golden rather than barren. He demands our busy moments so that our leisure time may be blessed by Him. He insists on being first, rather than second or third or even last. He regards anything less than first place in our lives as outright rejection of His invitation. And He is not disposed to wait. His invitation is not calculated to make people feel comfortable. If it makes you feel uncomfortable, that's the way He wants it. Say to Him, "I'm too busy to go to church, I'm too busy to pray, I'm to busy to take faith seriously, I'm too busy to be a follower of Jesus Christ," and He will reply, "That's why I'm inviting you right now." ~~The busy and difficult moments of life are God's opportunities.~~ I want First Place!

God wan't be put off. He is not a fool. He recognizes a turn-down when He sees it. He understands very well what people mean when they respond to His invitation: "Later on - later on when I'm not so busy, later on when the children are grown up, later on when my business is on its feet, later on - I'll start going to church regularly, and begin taking seriously the task of witnessing, worshiping, praying, and serving You." I do not know of a single case where this later on business has worked. The later on usually becomes still later on, until finally time has run out. What is more, we have to reckon with the fact that God can withdraw His invitation. It shocks some people to hear this, but that's another point of Christ's story. The master of the house grew angry and said: None of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper. God's judgment on continued refusal to accept His invitation can result in having to get along without Him - without His guidance and help, without His peace, and forgiveness, and the assurance of a blessed eternity.

There is a legend about the rich young man who wanted to become a follower of Christ. You will remember he came to Jesus and said, "Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus replied, "Keep the commandments of God." The young man responded, "All these have I kept from my youth on." Not satisfied with this reply, Jesus prodded him, "You lack only one thing - sell all you have, and give it to the poor, and come and follow Me." The Bible story ends there with the young man turning away sorrowing because he had great possessions. The legend goes on that this young man, now become old, his life about finished, found that possessions were not everything. He thought about Jesus and began to look for Him everywhere. Going up and down the land he inquired, "Where is this Jesus that I may follow Him? I will gladly give away my possessions and become His disciple." After a long search, he finally found a man who gave him an answer. The man said, "Haven't you heard? Jesus was crucified!"

Christ was crucified because of our refusal to give first place to God's invitation to become His sons and daughters and to conduct ourselves as members of His family. Christ died to put things right, and He was raised again from the dead as sure proof that He had succeeded. Everything is all right because Jesus has made it so. He accepted life's worst for us, taking our place, that there might be forgiveness and life in His Name.

God wants you. Of this you must be sure. You may not be the best or the greatest, the best father or the greatest business man, the best mother or the greatest housekeeper, the best son or the greatest student, the best daughter or the most beautiful girl in the world - but you come first in the heart of God. For you He sent His Son. For you Christ died; for you Christ lives; to you God issues His invitation to join His company by faith in Christ, to follow along in Christ's way, and to inherit the kingdom prepared for all those who love Him.

God insists that there will be guests at His dinner. Somebody is going to occupy those places at the heavenly feast. He goes into the streets and lanes of the city, into the highways and byways to seek out people who will accept His invitation.

The poor are invited - the poor in health, the ppor in love, the poor in friendship, the poor who feel themselves deprived of so many things - to them the invitation goes out, Come, for all things are now ready."

The servants were ordered to go out with an urgent invitation. Compel them to come in! God took strong action to redeem the world by the death of His Son. He takes strong action to invite the world to the full enjoyment of His forgiveness in Christ and to the satisfactions of that life which comes from following Christ. God invites, without making puppets of us. He invites by strong and even stern acting, forcing men to their knees, and driving them into His forgiving arms. He closes up a blind alley here, and a misleading path there, shutting off all possibilities except the road to the Cross of Christ. God pushes people in the right direction by all kinds of methods, thus compelling them to accept His free invitation.

Our Church stands here, dedicated to the glory of God, not as a social ~~organization~~ Chur, but to proclaim God's gracious invitation. You and I are His servants, called to invite people - not to join us - but to join Christ Whose life was given for them. To join Christ is to join a great company - those of every age and land, of every tongue and people and nation, who have put on the wedding garments of Christ own righteousness. They are the ten thousand times ten thousand who stand victorious before the throne of God, having washing their robes white in the blood of the Lamb. They are the ordinary men and women of our day who have received God's invitation and have joined the dinner guests at the divine feast of life in Christ..... Everyone of us will do well to ask ourself the question: AM I A PART OF THAT COMPANY?

Amen.