2nd Sunday after Trinity
Rolling Meadows - 1967

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

St. Luke 14: 17 COME; FOR ALL IS NOW READY!

The heart and center of this parable is THE UNBOUNDED MERCY OF GOD! God invites the invited - and then He goes out and invites the uninvited. It is the boundless mercy of God which is characteristic of the reign of God - the NEW AGE - which came upon the ~~human race~~ world and was ushered in when CHRIST was born in Bethlehem. HEAR THE INVITATION: COME; FOR ALL IS NOW READY - the invitation is being offered, and the invitation is good for all! THE SON HAS COME - HE IS HERE! The invitation is an invitation to faith! COME, BELIEVE IN THE SON, AND JOIN IN THE GREAT BANQUET!

When was it that THE INVITATION reached you? From the faces we wear sometimes - down-in-the-mouth, lacking in luster, grave, sullen, worried, and drawn with care - I am not always sure how you and I think of it. Jesus thought of the Kingdom of God every time as a feast or a great banquet or a wedding or some other glad thing. It moved in to the sound of opening doors and running feet, with voices calling, and lamps being lighted in the dark. It was somebody on a Spring morning sowing good seed; then after a while the full corn in the ear. It was a woman putting leaven into meal - a farmer who had found one day in some neighboring field a buried treasure, and made off to buy it - a merchant coming home with a pearl of great price - a net cast into the sea and drawn full to the shore. Story after story reads that way. The figures are taut and breathless: a king moved with compassion for a servant who owed far more than he could ever pay - a householder who had left all his goods in trust, getting back after a long journey when none of his agents ~~was~~ were looking for him - a landlord hiring laborers into his vineyard, with something for everybody to do, early and late. FOREVER THERE IS A PROCESS THAT HAS BEEN GOING ON UNNOTICED; when suddenly, at some zero hour, all of it comes to a head unexpectedly - perhaps disconcertingly - and people have to make up their minds about it and decide what to do. It isn't any kind of UTOPIA that is on the way - never think that! It is life, abundant life, life as God intended it, with MUSIC AND DANCING and HARVEST HOME! + sheer joy!

Listen to God's unfailing Word for it: ALL MY PREPARATIONS ARE MADE. I HAVE FINISHED NOW, AND I'M WAITING. What do you suppose was in Jesus' mind when He said that? Could it have been anything as far back as the first chapters of Genesis, when the earth took shape - and the heavens were spread out - and GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD? There are times when we stare with unblinking eyes at this creation of His, which every once in a while turns so sour, and can't see why on earth He ever did it. And the only hint the Bible gives us is that the yearning in His heart just came out that way - in the light, and the darkness, and the stars, and the green valleys, and — MAN! - And all of it somehow good up to that point! Then it went wrong. A devilish kind of self-will set itself against God's Will, and began cropping up everywhere. But if there was ever to be anybody to love Him freely, that was the risk He had to run. So He kept at it - and got Abraham up out of Ur of the Chaldees - and the children of Israel up out of Egypt - and on a day after that out of Babylon. The weary epic is like a lump in your throat if you read it with any kind of imagination at all: kings and psalmists - priests and prophets - a star over Bethlehem - and the Good God at the center of it all, always yearning, always seeking, always trying - a Child in a manger - a Man weeping over Jerusalem - a rejected Savior only 30 yrs. old on a Cross!

Have you ever watched a housewife getting ready for a big dinner party - the hurrying in and out - the sounds in the kitchen - the pleasing aroma of the cookin food? And then at last, she wipes her hands on the towel, smiles, and says, Come to the table - everything is ready! Jesus takes the slow, aching misery of the Centuries and folds it under - until the only thing you can see of the heart of God is like that image of a weary woman, glad and happy at her work. But you have to see in back of the Banquet itself the whole vast plan of God - with all the His love for His people in it, and all the suffering in it, and all that His mercy could fashion. And He holds it all out and says: THERE IS NOT A THING UNTHOUGHT OF - JUST COME! So the INVITATION goes forth - up and down the roads of Galilee and Judaea, across the Jordan - to Mary of Magdala, and Mary of Bethany, and Peter the fisherman, and Zacchaeus the publican, and to HOW MANY OF US? COME; FOR ALL

IS NOW READY!

There is nothing that could ever be GREATER, or GRANDER, or MORE GLORIOUS than this! There is nothing that is strange, or remote, or abstract about THE KINGDOM OF GOD - or God's relationship to His people. It is very personal, and it is very intimate. It is the fellowship and the communion of a GREAT BANQUET — God, the Host, and we, His guests. It is the kind of thing which we already experience - with all of its peace, and joy, and sheer exuberance - at the Lord's Supper. And, as St. John describes it in Revelation, the veil will one day be drawn back - and we shall see Him face to face - and the final, eternal life with God will culminate in our sitting around the tables of heaven and enjoying the final Messianic Banquet.

You wonder how anybody could pass this by - or treat this lightly. Yet, tragically, that is just what happens to God's INVITATION - and let's not imagine that any of us are exempt or immune! When the INVITATION is sounded - like mother when she calls for dinner - the kids are more absorbed in their play or in something else that they refuse to come - and finally in exasperation mother finally declares: All right, we will just eat without them! Multiply this by ETERNITY and you have the heart-breaking lament of Jesus' declaration: AND THEY ALL ALIKE BEGAN TO MAKE EXCUSES. Please hear more than the bare words. Hear beneath them the thing that whispered its sneer in Eden - like a snake slithering along the branches of a tree - only to change into a wild beast that roared out its madness on CALVARY. It has come to our generation in the spitting fire of machine guns, and the hiss of flamethrowers, and the thunder of canons, and in the blinding, searing heat of the bomb. You think that's worse than this simple record, THEY ALL ALIKE BEGAN TO MAKE EXCUSES? - I DON'T! Nothing is worse than to flout the gracious and unbounded mercy of God and treat it lightly - before GOOD FRIDAY or after it!

But, we say, we are not that sort of people. After all, we are here in Church almost every Sunday - and I could add that I am here for almost five hours every Sunday! But where do we go from here? Granted, the story is pictureque: the man with the piece of ground he had bought - he just had to go and see what it

was like; and the other, with the five yoke of oxen to inspect - what else could he do but take care of his investment? I PRAY YOU, they both said - I PRAY YOU, HAVE ME EXCUSED. Because the only reason they had was no more than an excuse, and they knew it, they tried to turn it back into a reason by tipping their hats and being reasonably polite about it. But you can't do that. BE AS POLITE AS YOU LIKE -- SO WHAT? NO IS STILL NO.... The third did have a reason which might well have passed muster: he had JUST MARRIED A WIFE! Even the RABBINICAL LAW allowed him a FULL YEAR to get over that - and I quote: TO CHEER UP HIS WIFE without being bothered by any shch engagements. When the INVITATION first came he could have foreseen how it was going to be with him - and so he declined in good time. At any rate, he did not have to be so rude about it. There was no hat-tipping now All he said was, I CAN'T COME! And that was very definitely that.

Would it help to transpose these three into our modern culture, and have them worried about real estate or the stock market or some domestic crisis? Never mind the piece of ground, the oxen, the wife? Let's just swap them for whatever it is that keeps so many of us from having anything vital to do with God - even when we come to church and say our prayers - things that get between us and Him - and block the road - and detour all the traffic - the treasures we have stashed away somewhere - the commitments we have from day to day - the cake we'd like to eat - or the plain bread we try to earn. What is it that we are REALLY AFTER? So often it is not God at all, but only these selves of ours - how can we save them, seeing that we so much dread to lose them - save these 3 score years and 10 and make the most of them -- kneeling in front of our little altars, tugging at the sleeves of our little God, Whose undertak~~e~~ing we think it is to listen to us and make everything come out as we want it to!

GOD IS NOT MOCKED. There comes a time when He kicks the dust off His feet and goes elsewhere. THE INVITATION STILL STANDS - IT STANDS EVEN WHEN IT IS TURNED DOWN. The summons goes on repeating itself. It veers off to the city's poor. You despised these outcasts if you were a Pharisee. It wasnlt at all like God to look them up - THE POOR AND MAIMED AND BLIND AND LAME - Out on the street

corners, in the parks, down the dark alleys - there by the hedgerows, in the open country where the tramps are, along the highways. THAT'S THE MUSIC. It is the sound of the trumpets which Satan in the old legend missed so much every morning after he had fallen from his high estate - missed them more than anything else in heaven: SO PIERCING LOUD that sometimes when we hear them on earth we almost want to stop our ears. They HAVE TO BE LOUD if they are to cover up our feeble excuses and the threat of GOD'S JUDGMENT that keeps running at our heels: NONE OF THOSE MEN WHO WERE INVITED SHALL TASTE OF MY BANQUET!

Lord, keep me from that! Keep me from despising Your gacious invitation!

JUST AS I AM, WITHOUT ONE PLEA
BUT THAT THY BLOOD WAS SHED FOR ME
AND THAT THOU BIDD'ST ME COME TO THEE,
O LAMB OF GOD, I COME, I COME!

Amen.