

Party Time

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Isaiah 25:6-9 — 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. And God will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; the LORD will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and God will take away the disgrace of God's people from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited, so that God might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in God's salvation.

Christians have a reputation, I think, for taking themselves seriously—and maybe, sometimes, a little too seriously. Often, it seems, our religious tradition encourages us to be disciplined, sober-minded, prudent, and perhaps prudish. We feel like we're supposed to be respectable, not rowdy; frugal, not frivolous; efficient, not excessive or extravagant. I mean, let's face it: we Christians aren't exactly known for being the life of the party.

And yet, spiritual writer Rob Bell says that “the church has nothing to say to the world until it throws better parties.” He's not saying we need balloons and confetti, or that we need kegs and strobe lights—not that any of those things would necessarily hurt. He is saying that we, as Christians, need to carve out time and space for food, fellowship, games, laughter; for enjoyment, celebration, communion with others. Not because it's practical or necessary or expected by society, but because it's fun. Because God made us to enjoy certain things, and it is good for us to enjoy them. And because we, as Christians, have a lot to celebrate.

Our second passage this morning describes a party: a feast with the best food and the best wine you can imagine. Biblical scholars would call these verses an eschatological passage. In theology, the word “eschaton” refers to the divine plan for the end of the world. So, this passage in Isaiah is eschatological in that it is imagining what it will be like when history has run its course and God ushers the world into eternity. And the eschatological vision we encounter here is a feast, where people are celebrating what God will do for us when we enter eternity: our God will destroy the shroud that is cast over all peoples; our God will swallow up death forever; our God will wipe away every tear from every face, and our God will take away everyone's disgrace. No more shame. No more suffering. No more dying. Just a party. That's where we're headed, Isaiah 25 envisions. So, why not start the party now?

Christians may not have a reputation for being the life of the party, but Jesus did. In both the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke, Jesus says that people are going around calling him “a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.” It seems that Jesus was known not just for his teaching and his healing, but also for his partying—whatever that looked like in

his time and place. And more specifically, Jesus was known for partying with the wrong kind of crowd, the kind of people who most others looked down on.

Friends, when Jesus ate and drank, when he sought out fellowship with the despised and neglected, he was inaugurating this eschatological feast in Isaiah 25. He would have been familiar with this passage, in fact. What we call “the Old Testament” was his Bible, the Hebrew Bible, and he knew it well. He would have read and heard about the eternal feast that God has planned, and he would have known that, unlike all the other feasts of his day, this one wasn’t planned for the upper crust, for only the rich and respectable. On the contrary, God’s eternal feast is “for all peoples,” Isaiah says. Every tear gets wiped away. Every disgrace gets destroyed. Every mouth gets fed. Everybody celebrates and says together, “This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in God’s salvation.” To follow Jesus, friends, is to join this party—and to help host it.

Our church is entering its stewardship season. That means that, in a handful of weeks, we will all be invited to make a pledge, a statement of what we plan to give to the work of our church in the upcoming year. These pledges will help prepare our church’s leadership to make decisions about what our church will do, how we’ll do it, and how we’ll pay for it this next year. Knowing this, the word “stewardship” can sound awfully serious. It’s about being responsible and respectable, decent and diligent. But what if, friends, stewardship is also about being joyful and playful, festive and fabulous? What if our giving—not just in terms of money, but in terms of time, talents, and energy—what if our giving was less obligatory and more celebratory? What if we gave in ways that brought ourselves and others joy?

Giving well, I believe, is a part of our Christian duty—not giving a lot, but giving well. And giving well means, in part, celebrating well. Each day, God offers us a taste of the eternal feast. How are you going to enjoy it today? And who are you going to invite to enjoy it with you tomorrow? Amen.