

Isaiah 55:1-5

“Come! Everyone!”

Pentecost 10 (Proper 13A)

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Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.

Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Imagine yourself walking through a marketplace. You hear tenants shouting from each booth about all the staples of life: “Fresh baked bread – two dollars!” “Ice Cold Milk – one dollar!” “Fresh berries – two dollars!” “Fine Wine – three dollars!”

But then you come up to a booth where you hear the unexpected: **“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price”** (Isaiah 55:1).

You think, “Everyone else is selling food and drink for money, what is with this merchant? There must be something wrong with his food and drink! Who would just give away food and drink?”

I don’t know about you, but I usually find it odd when a grocery store or convenience store is selling an item for cheap. Are they just trying to get rid of it? What’s wrong with it? Or, if I’m not familiar with a gas station brand and I see that it’s selling gas much cheaper than the known competition across the street, I can often see myself filling up my car with the more expensive gas. Afterall, I don’t want bad gasoline. I want my car to run.

So, it is rather odd hearing a merchant cry out, **“Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price!”**

So, you ask, “Why are you giving away your merchandise?” He replies, “My food and my drink has all been paid for! It is absolutely free! No strings attached! Don’t waste your money at those other booths. This here, is the richest of food and the most nourishing of drink. All those other booths offer food and drink that will never satisfy.” To this, you reply, “This has all been paid for? By whom? Who could have afforded to pay for this amazing food and drink and just give it away to others?”

Who could have done this, indeed. You likely have heard of those “pay-it-forward” drive through lines at Starbucks. You know, when the person in front of you pays for your bill. Sometimes it goes on nearly forever, especially in 2014 when 378 people at a Starbucks in St. Petersburg, Florida paid for the person behind them in line.

But for each of these “pay-it-forward” occurrences, they each come to an end. You see, there is someone who would rather receive a free coffee than pay for the person behind them.

But at this market, no money is ever necessary. The food and drink has been paid for. And this food and drink never runs out. It’s always there, and it’s always free.

All it takes to eat and to drink is to respond to the word of invitation: **“Come!”** No one is excluded from this invitation. The old, the young, the weak, the strong, the poor, the rich. Everyone is invited to receive free food and free drink!

You see, this booth has been paid for by God’s only begotten Son Jesus Christ. Jesus is the one who paid the price. Back in Isaiah 53, Isaiah prophesied what God’s Servant would do. He was inspired to write:

“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed”
(Isaiah 53:3-6).

I’m sure this sounds familiar. This was Good Friday. He was rejected and beaten. He was whipped and bloodied. He was crushed so much that He could not carry His own cross to His own execution. He was stricken, smitten, and afflicted.

Jesus did all of this to give us the richest of food and the most nourishing of drink and all for free! He bore our griefs. He carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions. He has all our sin and iniquity on His shoulders. And by His stripes, we are healed. On that cross, He prepares forgiveness. He pays the price for our sins. On that Easter morning, He proclaims His victory over the powers of sin, death, and the devil as He cries out: **“Come, everything is ready!”**

Now, Jesus didn’t just pay the purchase price for small things, such as are found at a market. He paid the price for big things. Just think of a fancy banquet, but this banquet never ends.

Jesus tells of this banquet in Luke 14. He said, ***“A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready’”*** (Luke 14:16-17).

Like the shouting merchant, this servant is saying, *“Come to the banquet, everything is ready! Here, you will receive the juiciest of meats, the tastiest of wine. Here, you will receive the best of the best! All you must do is come!”* But do you remember what happened? All at once, people began to make excuses:

- ***“I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.”***
- ***“I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.”***
- ***“I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.”*** (Luke 14:18-20)

Here at this banquet table is an incredible spread of food: forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. It’s a meal that satisfies, blesses our relationship with God and with our neighbor. But so often, we come up with excuses, and to be honest, lame excuses. Like those in the Parable of the Great Banquet, we plead necessity, we plead inconvenience, and we plead pleasure. We too, would rather be excused. But the real point of these excuses is that each excuse was dishonest. You see, the real reason they declined the invitation was that in their hearts they had a low opinion of the inviting Host. Their excuses were a cover-up for their contrary minds. They simply refused the invitation, because they were determined not to show honor to the inviting Host.

So, what does the Master of the banquet do? Does He just stop there and give up? No, He invites more and more and more people. He invites the unexpected, the poor and crippled, the blind and the lame. He invites sinners in need of salvation. And guess what? They come! And still there is room!

In today’s Gospel lesson, Jesus feeds 5,000 men, plus the women and children, with just five loaves of bread and two fish. By all earthly appearances, there could not be enough food, but not with God! So, like the unending supply of food and drink at the market, the banquet hall also never runs out of room, or food, or drink. It’s an unending supply!

You have been invited to this great meal, because Jesus did not remain crushed and beaten. He didn’t remain dead in the grave. No, He rose! He is risen! And He didn’t just live quietly after His resurrection. No! He presented Himself alive by many proofs, appearing to His apostles for 40 days and proclaimed the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3).

Jesus is inviting everyone to freely taste and drink. Again, status, power, money, fame and looks mean nothing to Him. You can't buy your way to salvation. You can only be invited by Jesus.

The food is ready. The tables are set. If you ever thought the never-ending pasta bowl at Olive Garden was amazing, just sit back and imagine this banquet feast that truly never ends. Rich food full of marrow. A feast of well-aged wine (Isaiah 25:6).

But guess what. Some chairs are empty. Some haven't arrived at the meal yet. They still need to be invited. And who does the inviting? We do. God works through means. We are those means. This is our vocation. So, we are the witnesses to the people who aren't yet at the table.

Just think about this, if 100 extra people suddenly showed up at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church on a Sunday, we would make room for them. But what first needs to happen? They need to be invited.

How did the Christian Church grow from 12 apostles to billions of people? Was it through an elaborate evangelism program? No! It's as simple as saying to your neighbor, "***Come and see,***" just as Philip said to Nathaniel (John 1:46). Through the working of the Holy Spirit, Nathaniel came to Jesus, and he believed. Philip just invited. The Holy Spirit did the rest!

Now, I am not Jesus. I am only Christ's under shepherd. But Jesus is here. He may be hidden, but He is present in the Means of Grace – the Word and Sacraments. In the Word, we receive the milk that Isaiah mentions. So, whenever we "***incline [our] ears***" (Isaiah 55:3) to hear, we receive spiritual milk for our faith. In the Sacraments, we "***come to the waters***" (Isaiah 55:1) of Holy Baptism. We also receive forgiveness of sins in Christ's Body and Blood under the bread and the wine that are bought without money and without price when we come to the Lord's Table.

Now, there are practical ways we can help with inviting family and friends – *your neighbors* – to church.

First, just because we can't buy our way to salvation doesn't mean that money isn't important to Christ's Church. This church building is the place we meet and receive Christ's gifts. Our offerings also assist the church's mission on proclaiming the saving Gospel here and abroad.

Second, most people who don't attend any church end up coming because someone invited them. This could be even those members we haven't seen in some time.

Our crucified and risen Lord has invited us. He purchased us through His atoning death. There is no more debt to be paid for our salvation. He has given us the best unending meal of forgiveness, life, and salvation, including for those who haven't yet been invited. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +