

## **You Are Invited**

Maybe I can get in trouble for saying so, but I believe God and his Son, our Lord Jesus, love a good party. While other Christians envision God as a sheriff with badge, whose only real interest is to make sure people behave right, I read the Bible and see that God actually likes to get people together and celebrate.

For example, perhaps the first significant event Jesus attended in the Gospels was a party, a wedding reception, the celebration of two people getting married. Well, the wine ran out too soon, and Jesus, at the request of his mother, turned water into wine, so the party could continue. Saving a party was Jesus' first miracle.

Another time, Jesus told a story about a son who came home after squandering his father's money. Instead of being angry, the father joyfully welcomed his once lost son home, and threw him a huge party. I believe this is our Heavenly Father's way of saying that whenever we come home to him, he wants to celebrate.

This doesn't mean Jesus was never serious. After all, he came to earth to die on the cross and save a sinful world. Even so, it seems the Lord enjoyed life on earth. This really bothered some religious leaders, who noticed Jesus often eating and drinking with people. So, they called him a glutton, drunkard, and friend of sinners.

This brings us to the Gospel reading. Jesus gives us yet another example of his interest in parties, by comparing God's Kingdom to a celebration. Here, Jesus tells a story about a king who gave a wedding reception for his son. Everyone in the king's service was put to work preparing food and making proper invitations.

However, for some reason, many of those who were invited made all kinds of excuses and refused to attend. So, the king told those in his service to go into the streets and invite everyone they could

find, both good and bad, moral and immoral people. Anyone who accepted the invitation was welcome at the celebration.

Of course, the king in this story is God, and the Son is Jesus. You may be wondering why the Lord would invite just anyone to the celebration. Well, the answer is in the story. He did it because he wanted the party to be full of people. So, God apparently throws the door open and invites in anyone who wants to come.

This may seem terribly irresponsible to some. Perhaps they worry who might get into God's party. I mean, what if they voted for Donald Trump in 2016? Will God let them into the party? Or what if they are voting for Joe Biden in 2020? Will God let them into the party? Will God really let just anyone into his kingdom?

Before we go any further, remember the party we are talking about is a celebration of a lifelong and eternal relationship with the Lord. We like to think we are in charge of this, but really, it is always and only God's choice to invite us. It's his party, he's in charge, and he, not you or me, can invite whomever he wants.

I always think it's interesting to ask, "Who would you want God to never invite?" Before you answer too fast, consider what it would be like to face people who think you should be excluded from God's kingdom and party. Maybe they believe some sin or something else in your life is reason enough for you to be shut out.

It's never fun to be excluded from a party. I remember a sad, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, Tom Colenso, who wasn't invited to a friend's Halloween party. All my other friends were, but I was not invited because the host of the party and I, liked the same girl. She would be there, he would be there, and so, I was stuck home, uninvited.

Well, I'm here today to tell you God has no intention of excluding you. In fact, God wants you at his party. God invites you into his

kingdom. He sent his Son, our Lord Jesus, to earth to die on the cross for you, just to show you how far he is willing to go, to extend an invitation to you to be part of the fun and celebration.

However, the truth is that God invites everyone into his kingdom to join in the party. This is because as our Gospel reading suggests, he wants the reception hall to be full. This is God's prerogative and not our decision. Maybe it's time simply to celebrate that we are invited, that we are there, and not to question others.

When the prophet Isaiah described God's kingdom, he also spoke of it as a party, a celebration, a great feast. Isaiah is particularly clear about how far and wide God's invitation to this party is. He says, "On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines."

Maybe we can call this the party to end all parties. Here God will once and for all invite and gather people from every nation, every race, every language, and every time, to a party. This party will be a celebration of God's final victory over sin, over the powers of hurt and evil in the world, and over the power of death itself.

The reading is crystal clear about this. All people are invited to the feast, and while we are feasting on that amazingly delicious meal, the Lord God will be feasting on anything and everything that has caused harm to people in this life. Anything which has caused us to cry, to feel shame, to feel hurt, will be gone.

Now, that's a party to which I want to be invited. That's a party to which I hope to go. That's a party where the mercy and grace, the forgiveness and love of God will reign forever and ever. I believe if you were to ask Jesus about this party, he would say, "That's a party worth dying for, and guess what, I did die for it."

You, my friends in Christ, are invited to this party. Answer the Lord's RSVP with a huge YES. Say – "Lord, I am so coming, I am so there, and I am so thankful for your grace." Furthermore, do not be surprised if this heavenly party is full of people as far as your eyes can see, because this was God's intention all along.

Doubtless, some will say this party image of our relationship with God and our future in heaven, is too much. Similarly, in the story of the son welcomed home by his father with a party, even after he had squandered all that money, there was another son. This son had stayed home with his dad, and now he was bitter.

He even told his dad that he should not have welcomed this other son home with such love and grace. There are people in the Christian Church who would do the same. They will question whether or not it is right for both good and bad people to be invited to and to be present within God's kingdom.

Yet, in God's eyes, there are no good people, and there are no bad people. There are no moral people, and there are no immoral people. Through Jesus Christ, we see how God sees. That there are just people who are sinners, who need God's forgiveness, who need God's grace, and Jesus came invite and save us all.

At the end of a wonderful child's book, "Go, Dog, Go," PD Eastman speaks about a dog party. He imagines dogs of every color, of every size, of every breed, gathering together on the top of a tree to enjoy a great dog party. I believe the Lord has imagined such a party for people too, and you, yes you, are invited.

Go, people, go. Amen.