

Sermon: Pentecost 20A October 11, 2026

Peace, Danville Pr. Lucy Kolin, preacher

Texts: Isaiah 25:1-9, Matthew 22:1-14

One of my favorite books about our life in faith is *Gratitude, the Heart of Prayer* by Brother David Steindl-Rast, a Benedictine monk and teacher. I was drawn back to it when Pr. Diane emailed me and said today's sermon was meant to be a stewardship sermon. I understand why, because we are in the midst of our congregation's stewardship emphasis that invites us to think about our stewardship as an act of faith and which will culminate in our individual pledges of time, talent, and money to Peace but also, I hope, to an expanded and imaginative vision of how stewardship can look in this day and age. Sometimes when we hear the word stewardship, we think only in terms of money. But stewardship is a **whole life** experience. And it is rooted in gratitude for all the gifts God has given us...our lives, our loved ones and friends, creation, our talents and opportunities, indeed everything that enables us to live out our faith with joy and generosity...not just for ourselves or our church but also for many others near and far.

Today's readings remind us of **God's** generosity and love. And today's celebration of Holy Communion or Eucharist (a Greek word that means "thanksgiving") reminds us of how far God in Jesus was and is willing to go to love us and save us...but also reminds us of God's vision for how much **we** can offer the world, indeed, can **bless** the world with our **own** acts of love and generosity, justice and peacemaking...for that is the stewardship life. Stewardship is not just for a month but all lifelong...and we can grow in our stewarding, no matter how old we get.

In the Isaiah reading, we find a vision of **God's** generosity, not just for one people but for **all** people. It's expressed in a sumptuous feast God prepares and serves up on God's holy mountain. No one is worthy of it, no one has earned it, but everyone is meant to receive it. And

even though history tells us that the poor are seldom on the receiving end of the good things the rich take for granted, God promises to upend the system, to offer something completely different, to provide the things that make for life to **everyone**. No one has earned it, no one deserves it, but everyone is meant to receive it, because that is God's plan and desire. We know, of course, that human beings are not good at sharing and often make their own rules about who gets even the basics of life...food and housing...even dignity and kindness. The result is that people are divided...and excluded from what is needful. But God's way is the way that is intended to bless **everyone**...and because we are people of God, it is now the way **we** are called to embrace as well, not just in our thinking but also in our living.

Oh, but then we have that troubling parable from Matthew's gospel. It, **too**, is a story about a meal...a meal to celebrate the wedding of a king's son. The invitations go out way ahead of time and, hearing no regrets, the royal caterers set to work on a feast worthy to be offered by a king. But when the day came and the king dispatched servants to remind the guests of the time and place, those who'd been invited refused to come. The king, showing extreme patience, sent **another** group of messengers to say, "Come **now** – all is ready!" But **again** the guests refused – they didn't even give the king the courtesy of an excuse; they didn't even offer an **alibi**; they just didn't come...which was more than a social *faux pas*; it was an act of outright rebellion. And to show exactly what they thought of the invitation...and by extension the king and his son, they tortured and killed the messengers the king had sent.

When the king found out what the A-list guests had done, he said, "Fine." Then, while the finishing touches were put on the cake and the garnish on the main dish, he ordered the death of the murderers and the destruction of the city. But because he couldn't bear to see a good meal go to waste and because he really wanted to fill the banquet hall, the king sent his servants out to the thoroughfares, to those places on

the very edge of the city where streets turned into open space beyond the city walls. There they pitched the invitation once **again**...this time to people of every sort and degree of respectability, to people on the B list and to people on **no** list, to anyone and everyone without exception.

Soon the hall was filled with guests who came accepting the generosity of the king, guests who gladly put on the special wedding garment provided for the occasion. Such garments were the ancient equivalent of sandwich boards or swag bags bearing a sponsor's logo or name, saying silently but unmistakably: the one who gave me this robe is generous and worthy to be thanked, my patron and my benefactor.

Now up to **this** point, the fact that Jesus is depicted telling this parable to Jewish leaders might lead you to think that Matthew was venting his spleen on the Jewish authorities of his time. But Matthew was much more concerned about his own **Christian** community and their habit of getting it wrong about God's grace. In his own community, Matthew saw people so busy sorting out the good and the bad in others that they had no time to be in awe of the grace that had brought them to the table of salvation. So he wanted to underscore the amazing but disturbing truth that the same invitation goes out to **everyone**, that the call to follow Jesus and become part of God's beloved community is a **universal** call, a move prepared for by Jesus' outrageous habit of dining with the sublime and the ridiculous, mingling with those who took their membership in Club Grace for granted and wooing those who'd been told not to bother to apply. And **this** move was but the prelude to the cross, where Jesus opened his arms to the world and to the empty tomb where, raised from the dead, Jesus declared death a liar. In this parable, Matthew and Jesus **both** are saying, "Let me assure you you've heard correctly: anybody can get in and everyone is welcome. The ruler of the universe is taking down the walls so that the **whole world** can dance at the party that marks the marriage of heaven and earth and the death of death itself."

But Matthew **also** saw his fellow church members acting as though there was no life after baptism, living as though the holy bath had **not** plunged them directly into the struggle of the culture of life against the culture of death...the life and the struggle that is discipleship. So the parable goes on, telling of a guest who stuck out like a sore thumb. **This** guest got the same gracious invitation everyone **else** did and was offered the same robe everyone **else** was wearing. But he refused to put it on. He refused to express his gratitude to the king; he refused to get into the spirit of the party. But that didn't mean he shouldn't have been invited. There was no mistake on the part of the king. It was the **guest's** mistake to think he had received an invitation he could refuse or accept on his own terms.

In the early Church, when people talked about conversion and baptism, they often did so in the language of putting on new clothes, of exchanging the old way of life for the new. Once donned in baptism, there was meant to be continuing growth in gratitude for grace, daily expressed in new speech, new attitudes, and new behaviors toward God and the neighbor.

The guest in the parable didn't see it this way. He saw grace as cheap and God as *laissez faire*. He believed that, once in the door, what he said and did didn't matter at all, that God would say "Whatever" and pay no attention to a life that lacked depth and commitment. But he was sadly mistaken. The life of gratitude is not the **price** of admission to God's eternal banquet, but it **is** the sign that we know and acknowledge the price God's own **Child** has paid for our admission.,

And what does such a life look like? A life like Jesus' – of welcome, solidarity, and self-giving...a life of gratitude and generosity like Jesus' own. And each Sunday we are welcomed to the feast God has prepared...a simple feast but one that multiplies grace under bread and wine and joins us to God and one another in an eternity of friendship. And we receive power to live lives that show the world that "we have

eaten together,” becoming a living parable that gives a glimpse of the world that is to come. How? By giving from what we’ve been given – time, talents, money, love, consolation, advocacy, and prayer...by welcoming all people without reservation or distinction, by standing up for neighbors near and far who are denied dignity and the things that make for life, by speaking up for policies and practices in the institutions of this world that foster solidarity and peace instead of division and privilege...by gladly wearing the garment of salvation and the robe of baptism day after day until we stand together, one people from every nation, praising God and sharing in the feast that has no end. That’s stewardship – that’s the stewardship life.

Day by day, year by year, we give from what we’ve been given, not from what we do not have. We give, in gratitude for all these gifts, in whatever measure we have them. And we give freely of what we **have**, not what we **lack** in thanksgiving for the grace that has brought us life and love from the God of all and because we are now united with all whom God loves and want them to flourish, not suffer, feel loved, not dismissed. Then, as Brother David writes, stewardship will be a **joyful** way of life, because we know ourselves and all our brothers and sisters blessed and beloved.

So, in the days ahead, as you think and pray about your **own** stewardship, when you receive messages from our congregational leaders about what the future holds and what will be needed to bring it to reality, may you and I prayerfully consider what we have been given and plan what we will give in the coming year, not because we should or have to, not because we want our budget to balance and provide what is needed for Peace to sustain and grow its ministry, but because we have been blessed, individually and as a community, with gifts and resources that can minister to people in and beyond this congregation, this city, and this country, can assist our sisters and brothers in Nicaragua and South Africa, and increase love and justice. Peace Lutheran Church: blessed to be a blessing! Amen.