

Season of Plenty: Inviting

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – October 6 2024

20th Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: Isaiah 55:1-9; 1 Peter 4:8-11; Luke 14:7-11 NRSVue

Reflection: Psalm 65

Greeting: We waited like patient children to be made righteous by faith in Christ. We are all God's children through faith in Christ Jesus. All who were baptized into Christ have been clothed in glory with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to the promise of God's love. (Galatians 3)

Prayer: God, our guide and our guardian, we seek you together in peace and gratitude. Help us this day as we join together to sing your praises and glorify your name. Help us to remember the generosity you have shown us as we remember your invitation to have a place at your table. We are thankful that you bless us by your grace that we may know your steadfast love and faithfulness are with us all the days of our lives. Watch over us, Heavenly Father, that we may know your gentle hand. Guide us by your Holy Spirit that we may know the direction you need us to go. And let us walk in the footsteps of your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, that we may follow in truth and light. May we share in the plenty that we find when we put our trust in your word and your way. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 65

¹ Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion, and to you shall vows be performed,

² O you who answer prayer! To you all flesh shall come.

³ When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us, you forgive our transgressions.

⁴ Happy are those whom you choose and bring near to live in your courts.

We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, your holy temple.

*⁵ By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation;
you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas.*

(Psalm 65:1-5 NRSVue)*

We read the words of Psalm 65, and we hear of God's salvation. That the Lord invites us to deliverance in his Kingdom. That God calls us to answer the call to follow him in hope and faith. How do you give thanks for the ways in which you have been invited to share in the blessings that God provides? Who can you lift up in your prayers this week? How can you invite others to share in the plenty that God has provided? What are some ways that you can give thanks with others for the blessings we find in God's grace? How will you reflect the love of Christ in this season of plenty?

Prayer: O Lord, we thank you for listening to the voice of your people. No matter what we face we know that we never face it alone because you are with us. We thank you that your peace is ever before us. We come to you accepting your invitation in Christ, knowing that you provide for us with your steadfast love and faithfulness. We seek you out in our prayers this day, lifting up the causes that we have to rejoice. We turn to you with the difficulties that we face in our daily lives. We lift up all that we have spoken together, bringing all that we have before you. We also turn to you with the silent pleadings of our hearts, both the quiet praises that we lift up and the silent struggles we hold within. Though they go unspoken, we know that they never go unheard. We bring you our joys and our concerns, our happiness and our sorrow, our mourning and our gladness, knowing that you are there for us in all things. Help us to celebrate that you are with us with the plenty we find in your abounding love and care. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible Updated Edition. Our first reading is from Isaiah chapter 55, verse 1 through 9.

¹Hear, everyone who thirsts; come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. ²Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your earnings for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. ³Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. ⁴See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. ⁵Now you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you. ⁶Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; ⁷let the wicked forsake their way and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. ⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. ⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:1-9 NRSVue)*

Our next reading is from 1 Peter chapter 4, verse 8 through 11.

⁸Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹Be hospitable to one another without complaining. ¹⁰Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. ¹¹Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:8-11 NRSVue)*

Our final reading is from Luke chapter 14, verse 7 through 11.

⁷When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. ⁸“When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host, ⁹and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. ¹⁰But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. ¹¹For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” (Luke 14:7-11 NRSVue)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This week we look at inviting as part of our season of plenty. And the inviting is the invitation that we find in Christ to have a seat at the table and in the way that we are called to invite others. We hear of how we are to respond with humility, with patience, and with love. That we are called to be a people who care. We see this humility in our gospel reading for the day. Jesus sees how people are responding to an invitation. He sees the way that people are taking their seats and makes a point of telling a parable about humility. That if you are invited somewhere, such as a wedding banquet, don't take the place of honor expecting that it is for you, but be humble. Put yourself in the lowest place, so that if someone else elevates you, that it is a favor being done for you in your humility. That you won't be humiliated if you are asked to move because you've thought too highly of yourself. And the main thrust behind this is this last line that we get from Luke. “For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” That humility in responding to God's grace, to responding to that invitation, is an important part of the invitation. Because if we do not respond with humility, then we will not see others as equal in Christ. If we do not respond to God's invitation with humility, we will always think ourselves better than the people that we are called to serve.

And we hear some of that in our reading from 1 Peter. That we are to be good stewards of God's grace, serving one another. We serve each other because we are called to act in Christ. That when we speak, we should expect our words to reflect how we feel about God. That we serve with the strength that God provides us in the invitation that he has given us, so that we can invite others, and that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. And that we do it all out of love. A love that covers a multitude of sins, and those sins include our own and the sins of others. Part of that humility, again, is knowing that we needed to be forgiven so that we can invite others to accept forgiveness. That these readings help highlight exactly what it is we see and what we find in accepting the invitation to God's table. And it's something we think about with communion. I chose to put this on World Communion Sunday because of the fact that it is a time that we remember that we are all invited to share in one cup and to eat from one loaf. That we are called together to serve Christ and to serve each other in Christ.

This is something we really hear about in our Old Testament reading today from the prophet Isaiah. Because it is just an open invitation. That everyone who thirsts should come to the waters. Come and get good things without price. Because God provides out of his plenty

for his people. We are called to listen to God so that we may live, and that we may live secure. Because God's promise for us is a promise of love. That we can invite strangers to come and share in the plenty that we have because God provides for all people. That we should seek God whenever we have the opportunity. We will find him wherever he may be found. And that God is always willing to forgive. That we invite people to turn to God because we know we are all forgiven when we seek forgiveness. One of the things that we hear is that God will forgive those that we may struggle to. That God will invite those that we may be hesitant to invite. And it's because God is not us. Us. Because we have human thoughts and human fears. We have human worries. That we call on God so that he can help us to overcome our own fears, our own anxieties. That we call on God so that we can strive to get past all of those things that hold us back. We call the lost to return to the Lord because we know he is a God of mercy. More merciful than we could ever hope to be. And yet we strive to share in that mercy because we know the invitation that has been shared with us. That all who go astray are called to return to the Lord. That all who have sinned are called to ask for forgiveness. And even if we can't imagine how somebody could be forgiven, God can forgive. Because God's thoughts are not our thoughts and God's ways are not our ways. We are called to give up the ways of the world and cling to God.

But as people we struggle. And that's okay. Because the invitation that we find in coming to this table is an invitation that says that we are here because we are loved. Not because we have earned our place. We are not here to be given the seat of honor because of how great we are. But we are here because we need forgiveness, compassion, and love. That this table is not simply a place where those who are incredibly righteous are invited to come and eat. But it is a table set for those who earnestly repent. Those who seek to be forgiven in Christ's name. It is a place for those who are lost to be found. It is a place for the abandoned to find home. It is a place that we come to because we are seen as equal in the eyes of Christ. All worthy of love. All worthy of a seat at the table. Because this table is one that unites us. It is a table that goes beyond just this church. It goes beyond just this denomination. It is a table set for all who seek it. Because all are welcome. It is a place where we come to eat of one bread. No matter how many loaves it is spread out upon, this day we join together, and we eat of one bread because it is the body of Jesus Christ our Lord. It is he who invites us to share together as one body, as the body of Christ. That no matter how many cups it is divided into, we drink from one cup that represents the blood of one Savior poured out for you and for many, for all people who seek to be forgiven. The blood of Christ is there to wash away our sins and make us whole. And it is there for all people. We eat from one bread and drink from one cup. Serving one God. Sharing in one hope. The hope of our risen Savior. We come together so that we may share in this unity and share in this bond. Because we have answered the call. We are invited to share together and we are called to invite others. We are called to invite them in love so that they may know they are loved. We are called to invite them because we know the truth of our Savior is that all are welcome. Because the least and the last have a place at this table. Because here we are

God's people. Here we are God's children. Reconciled to him. Forgiven by him. And we are loved. Loved by a Savior who would give his all so that we would understand this invitation.

So, I encourage you to think about who you can invite to this table. Who it is that you can call upon to tell them that they are forgiven and they are loved. To think about who it is that you know that could be reconciled to God so that they would have the hope that we all share in Christ. Because we are called to be a people who invite all to share in God's grace and mercy and love. We are called to be a people who invite others to the table so that they may have a place in the kingdom. Because we are called always to share the love of Christ. For we are the body of Christ redeemed by his blood. We serve one another in love and compassion. We share with one another the hope that all may accept this wonderful invitation. We share the hope that we may all be together in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Season of Plenty

This series is a reflection on the work we are called to do as the body of Christ. In it, we explore how we invite others to the table and how we share in what we have. God's love as our shepherd acts as an example that we can follow. We are called to share in the harvest as we care for others and act with the Holy Spirit. In this season of plenty, how will you share the peace of Christ with others?

9/22: Harvesting
10/13: Sharing

9/29: Shepherding
10/20: Timing

10/6: Inviting

Neoga Grace UMC

752 Walnut
PO Box 610
Neoga, IL 62447
(217)895-2809
Worship 10:30am

Toledo UMC

Madison & Ohio St
PO Box 267
Toledo, IL 62468
Worship 8:15am

Etna UMC

2799 Etna Rd
Mattoon, IL 61938
Worship 9:30am

Rev Camron D St.Michael
<https://stmichael.pw>
cdstmichael@outlook.com
(316)530-3182 (call or text)
PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

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