

You're Invited

People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God (Luke 13:29).

Scripture: Luke 13:23-30

Song: “When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder”

On November 24, 2009, a couple from Virginia “crashed” a state dinner at the White House for Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Without invitations to the event, the couple rode to the White House in a limousine. Impeccably groomed, coiffed, and attired, they passed through two security checkpoints and proceeded to the dinner. Although their names were missing from the guest list, a news reporter later surmised that they gained entrance because they simply looked and acted the part.

At the feast in God’s kingdom, however, there will be no impostors, no security breaches. Those who have responded to God’s invitation—who have arrived by way of the narrow gate, by grace through faith—will enjoy the feast He has prepared for those who love Him.

With the gospel before us today, there is nothing to prevent us from attending the most magnificent and important feast of all time. It’s not by appearances or by our own devices that we will gain entrance to that event, but by our humble response to God’s provision of salvation through His Son.

Father, thank You for Your invitation to be among those who will dine at “the wedding supper of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:6-9). It is on Your terms, not my own, that I gratefully respond. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Grace After Gracie

[God] healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds (Psalm 147:3, *KJV*).

Scripture: Psalm 147:1-6, 12-20

Song: “Tell It to Jesus”

Someone has observed that when you get a pet, it *steals* your heart, and when it dies, it *breaks* your heart. This was certainly true of my experience with Gracie, who arrived in our home as an 8-week-old Malshi—a Maltese and Shih Tzu mix. From the start, her devotion was clear. Her main goal seemed to be to please my wife and me. She would sit on my lap or rest at my feet. Often she rode in the car with me. However, everything changed one weekend when Gracie became sick and listless. After taking her to the animal hospital, we received the dreadful news that she was dying. Grief filled our hearts. She was only five years old.

Even as God’s children, we have our share of loss and sadness in this life. Jesus said to His disciples, “In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33). There’s no escaping it. But how blessed we are to have a God who is with us and comforts us in our grief!

Three months after losing Gracie, God gave us Joy, a Havamalt—part Havanese and part Maltese. Joy is a little dynamo of energy and mischief, and she has soothed our grief. I don’t know whether dogs go to Heaven, but if they do, I anticipate seeing Gracie again. But in any event, I am convinced that God is good . . . all the time!

Father, thank You for grace that triumphs over grief. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The World Is in God's Hands

“When the earth and all its people quake, it is I who hold its pillars firm” (Psalm 75:3).

Scripture: Psalm 75

Song: “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands”

Although about 20,000 earthquakes occur annually around the world—approximately 55 per day—Californians must surely feel as if they get more than their fair share of them. Besides the many smaller tremors, five major quakes occurred between 1980 and 2019, causing more than \$60 billion in damage and claiming 477 lives. Even those seismic events, however, don’t compare to what residents refer to as The Big One, which they anticipate will one day cause unprecedented devastation. In the meantime, they take precautions and hope for the best.

Of course there are all kinds of natural disasters in our world—hurricanes, volcanoes, tornadoes, floods, wildfires, avalanches, and tsunamis, just to name a few. But we who have entrusted ourselves to God’s care do not need to live in fear of what may come, whether now or in the future. Earthquakes may topple trees and buildings, but they cannot topple God from His throne.

Is there something you are living in fear of, something that feels out of your control today? This moment is an opportunity for you to remember that God, who holds all things in the palm of His hand, is also holding you close to His heart. You can rest in His care right now.

Father, I do not understand why devastating events occur in my life, but I trust that You will carry me through, even when they strike. In Jesus’ name, amen.

No Injustice with God

What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! (Romans 9:14).

Scripture: Romans 9:6-16

Song: “To God Be the Glory”

An injustice—great or small—leaves us bereft of a rightful outcome, unsettled and haunted by how things should be but are not. When sin entered the world, injustice grew up within human interactions like the thorns and thistles that grew up from the ground, now cursed. Human history festers from the prickles and sticks of our thorny interactions, including and especially the injustices done to one another.

As believers, we can give thanks that there is no unfairness with God. His very character is just, true, and righteous. The writer of Psalm 45 declares, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom” (v. 6). Human judges may fail because they lack all the information or because they have been deceived or because they are corrupt. But the Lord is too knowledgeable, righteous, and true to render an unjust verdict or mete out an undeserved punishment. God, the perfect judge, never makes a mistake.

When we don’t understand why God is doing what He’s doing or allowing what He’s allowing, it’s important to remember that He sees all and knows all, and He will tend to every matter—whether here or in eternity—as is perfectly fitting. In the meantime, we can trust His faithfulness in all things and entrust our longing for justice to Him.

Father, I trust You, the righteous judge, to carry out justice in Your time and in Your way. In Jesus’ name, amen.

In the Potter's Hands

Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use? (Romans 9:21).

Scripture: Romans 9:17–29

Song: “Have Thine Own Way, Lord”

I sometimes remark that my hair used to resemble the waves of an ocean but now only the beach remains! Not only am I bald and wish I had still had hair, but I'm also short and wish I were taller. Nevertheless, being bald has its benefits; for example, I never have a bad hair day. And being short . . . well, I don't have to bend over very far to reach an item on the bottom shelf at the grocery store.

Our Lord, the master potter, created each of us. And far more significant than any physical trait we bear is the work He's doing within our hearts as He shapes us into “the image of his Son” (Romans 8:28-29). As we “grow in the grace and knowledge” of Christ (2 Peter 3:18), our Lord intends for us to be Christ's ambassadors, urging unbelievers to “be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20). His purpose is also for us to “become blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation’” (Philippians 2:15).

I may not be able to restore my hair or grow an inch taller, but in the Lord's hands I can grow spiritually by submitting to God's Spirit and God's Word.

Father, it's my desire today and every day to be submissive and cooperative as You shape my character. In Jesus' name, amen.

A Promise to Bless All Peoples

In thee [Abraham] and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed (Genesis 28:14, *KJV*).

Scripture: Genesis 28:10-22

Song: “We’ve a Story to Tell to the Nations”

While I served as an interim pastor in the Denver area, I (along with members of the church), helped lead a worship service at the local rescue mission. We provided music, testimonies of God’s grace, and a brief gospel message. Occasionally our song leader would ask if anyone had a favorite song. Invariably, someone requested that we sing “Jesus Loves Me.” Later in the service it was my privilege to tell the men and women how the Lord proved His love for each of them.

The gospel is proof that God kept His promise to Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac. Isaac was the father of Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel. Israel was the father of 12 sons, one of whom was Judah. King David came later through Judah’s descendants. And from David’s descendants came our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Through Jesus the blessing of salvation is available to all who will believe.

What a testimony to God’s faithfulness that the gospel message continues to be proclaimed throughout the world to this day: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16, *KJV*). Jesus loves you. Jesus loves me. This is the greatest blessing of all!

Father, thank You for always keeping Your promises. I will speak of Your faithfulness today at every opportunity. In Jesus’ name, amen.

God's Unconditional Love

Isaac loved Esau, . . . but Rebekah loved Jacob (Genesis 25:28, *KJV*).

Scripture: Genesis 25:19-34

Song: "Jesus Loves Me"

The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour was wildly popular in the late 1960s. In one of the duo's dialogues, Tom lamented to his brother, Dick, "Mom always liked you best!" That line became an instant classic. I can't help but wonder if Esau ever said that same thing to Jacob.

It's important for children to know that their parents (or caregivers) love them. But even more important is for them to know God's love, which doesn't play favorites and never fails. It is evident to me from studying God's Word that the Lord loves all believers equally, unconditionally, and forever. He loves each of us without regard to our race, financial status, education, or age. He loves us even when we struggle or stumble in our walk with Him, and in love He disciplines us for our good (Hebrews 12:7-11). And in John 13:1 we read that Jesus loved His disciples "to the end." He has taken the initiative to love us, and it's His love that motivates us to love Him in return (1 John 4:19).

Even the best human parents will fail at times. But our heavenly Father is unwavering in His love and devotion to us. We may not always understand His ways, but we can always trust His heart of love.

Father, thank You for loving Your children as You do. Today I will trust that You are with me, that You are for me, and that You love me. In Jesus' name, amen.