October 11 , 2026

The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost:
Proper 23



Morning Prayer & Sermon

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Propers and Sermon for October 11 Proper 23A

Psalm 23: BCP Page 612

This is the song of the people of God.
Thanks be to God.

A Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah:

O LORD, you are my God;
I will exalt you, I will praise your name;
for you have done wonderful things,
plans formed of old, faithful and sure.
For you have made the city a heap,
the fortified city a ruin;
the palace of aliens is a city no more,
it will never be rebuilt.
Therefore strong peoples will glorify you;
cities of ruthless nations will fear you.
For you have been a refuge to the poor,
a refuge to the needy in their distress,
a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat.

When the blast of the ruthless
was like a winter rainstorm,
the noise of aliens like heat in a dry place,
you subdued the heat with the shade of clouds;
the song of the ruthless was stilled.

On this mountain the LORD of hosts
will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,
of rich food filled with marrow,
of well-aged wines strained clear.
And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations;
he will swallow up death forever.
Then the Lord God will wipe away
the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people
he will take away from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.

It will be said on that day,
Lo, this is our God;
we have waited for him,
so that he might save us.
This is the LORD for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

The word of the Lord. ***Thanks be to God.***

A reading from St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians:

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to
be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the people of God.
Thanks be to God.



A reading from the Gospel according to St. Matthew:

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come.

Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.' But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests. "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen."
Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches. ***Thanks be to God.***

Spirit of God, shine your light upon the words you have set before us this day, and into our hearts and minds, that we may be enlightened with fresh understanding and insight into the heavenly banquet to which you invite us; in the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

"On this mountain" God promises through the Prophet Isaiah, "the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food." Filled with marrow. Of well-aged wines, strained clear.

The "hosts" to which Isaiah refers are the armies of heaven—the Common English Bible consistently translates this as "the Lord of heavenly forces" all 225 times the phrase occurs in the Hebrew Scriptures. The first five verses of today's lesson celebrate the victory of those heavenly forces over the enemies of God's people, and the promised banquet will anticipate the lifting of the shroud that is spread over all nations, and the final overthrow of death.

The familiar images of the Twenty-third Psalm present God as both caretaker and host. We first encounter God as the One who provides for us all we need—as Jesus taught us to pray: Give us this day our daily bread. Lush meadows, and quiet pools to drink from.

The One who is present with us in the valley of the shadow of death—our darkest moments. Note the change here, which we commonly miss in our familiarity with the words and images. God is no longer referred to in the third person, but addressed in the second person. For the Psalmist this is not received as a vague intellectual promise, but experienced in the realities of life. The Shepherd's rod to beat off dangerous predators; the Shepherd's staff to guide away from danger and toward home.

Leaving the valley of the shadow of death, we find ourselves at a table filled with all the rich things Isaiah describes, provided in the presence of those who wish us ill. Anointing, or covering the head with oil, seems to have been a common gesture of hospitality in antiquity. Amos and Micah both mention the practice in their condemnation of the lavish lifestyles of the excessively wealthy, and Jesus contrasts the failure of his Pharisee host to anoint his head with the devotion of the woman who entered the house uninvited to anoint Jesus' feet. Anointing also set one apart as chosen, usually as a king or a priest, and was used for medicinal purposes as well.

> Your beauty and love chase after me
> every day of my life.
> I'm back home in the house of GOD
> for the rest of my life. (Psalm 23:6 *The Message*)

The parable of the Wedding Banquet is told in Matthew, Luke, and the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas. Matthew has taken Luke's bare-bones story of a dinner given by an ordinary citizen, told much earlier in the narrative, five chapters before Palm Sunday, in connection with a teaching on humility. The only consequence of the refusal of the invitation by those with better things to do was the permanent revocation of the invitation.

Matthew's Jesus tells the story amid the dark teachings and somber events of Holy Week, an element of his ongoing confrontation with the chief priests and the Pharisees. The dinner is now a wedding banquet, given by a king for his son, giving the tale political overtones. This is no private party among friends, but a command performance at the palace, and the refusal of the invitation has escalated from indifferent rudeness to civil disobedience at best, or rebellion at worst. Luke's guests simply send their regrets by the servants sent to summon them; Matthew has two sets of servants sent out, some of whom are seized, mistreated, even lynched. So, before inviting the riff-raff to fill the banquet hall, the King sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. All before the pot roast got cold!

In some ways Matthew's setting reflects the realities of the community for which Matthew wrote in the early 70's. As Jewish Christians, Matthew's audience was all too familiar with violence, bloodshed and destruction, having lived through the destruction of Jerusalem by Roman armies in the year 70.

Unique to Matthew as well is the curious incident involving the guest who was discovered in the banquet hall without a proper wedding robe. I don't think there are very many homeless people, now or then, who keep a tuxedo or formal gown in their shopping carts. His condemnation seems to have been in his not making a response. He was not willing, or able, to enter into relationship with the king to work out the details of the dress code.

Maybe his circumstances would have excused him from his lack of proper attire. Maybe the king had a supply of wedding garments on hand, and he could have borrowed one. But he'll never know, because he couldn't or wouldn't engage the king in dialogue to address the issue.

The parables of invitation and feasting in today's lessons are but three among many in biblical literature. God throws a party at the drop of a hat, for all kinds of reasons.

A lamb dinner is eaten in haste in Exodus 12, as God's people prepare to leave slavery in Egypt. The blood of those lambs was part of the instrument by which that freedom was brought to pass, and that same meal is celebrated annually by the families who constitute God's people Israel, to this day.

Jesus inaugurates his ministry in John 2, by performing his first miracle at a wedding in Cana, saving the day when the wine ran out.

A father in Luke 15 gives a feast to celebrate the return of a son, who "was dead, but is alive, was lost, but now is found." Get the finest robe we have. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Kill the fatted calf. It's time for a party.

Jesus gathers his disciples for a final Passover meal on the night before his suffering and death. He took the bread as they all looked at the remains of the Passover lamb. He held it up before them and he said, "This is my Body." He took the last cup of wine and he said, "This is my Blood."

"Do this in remembrance of me."

And week after week, down through the ages, the Church has done precisely that, looking back to God's mighty acts in the past, identifying God's gracious activity in our world and in our lives in the present, and looking forward to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in the 19th Chapter of the Revelation to St. John, of which our Eucharist is a foretaste and to which we all have a standing invitation:

> THERE came a voice from the throne saying: 'Praise our God, all you his servants, you that fear him, both small and great!'
> And I heard what sounded like a vast throng, like the sound of a mighty torrent or of great peals of thunder, and they cried:
>
> > 'Hallelujah! The Lord our God, sovereign over all, has entered on his reign! Let us rejoice and shout for joy and pay homage to him, for the wedding day of the Lamb has come! His bride has made herself ready, and she has been given fine linen, shining and clean, to wear.'
>
> (The fine linen signifies the righteous deeds of God's people.)
>
> THE angel said to me, 'Write this: "Happy are those who are invited to the wedding banquet of the Lamb!" ' He added, 'These are the very words of God." (Revelation 19:6-9)

Bishop Brown was asked once about altar calls in the Episcopal Church. The questioner had in mind the highly emotional experience of the sawdust trail, where worshippers were invited to make a new or renewed commitment to Jesus Christ, then to come forward in expression of that commitment.

Bishop Brown's response was that in the Episcopal Church, we do that every Sunday. Ironically, it's not happening today, but week by week, the Priest presents the consecrated Bread and Wine, inviting us to "come to the table in faith…

[to receive] the gifts of God for the people of God,
…in remembrance that Christ died for you,
and [to] feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving."

Then, just like anyone on the sawdust trail, we get up out of our seats and we come to the altar. We kneel at the rail, and we hold out our hands,

and our Savior feeds us with his own Body and Blood.

In that action, past, present and future become one, as we are connected with the perfect sacrifice of Christ, that transcends time and space.

We are there as God prepares his people to escape slavery in Egypt, gives them the Law, and guides them through the wilderness to the Promised Land.

We hear the prophets recalling them, and us, to the covenant love which is our relationship with God.

We are there as Jesus opens our minds to the Scriptures on the road to Emmaus, and makes himself known to us in the breaking of bread.

And we are present in the New Jerusalem, joining with all the saints in the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Collect of the Day

Lord, we pray that your grace may always precede and follow us, that we may continually be given to good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen*