

Proper 6-C - 6/6/10 – Isaiah 55:1-5; Matthew 22:1-10 – Party Time

Okay, let's put on our party hats, get out our noise makers, and celebrate! Everyone loves a party! Everyone seems to be celebrating something: graduation, end-of-the-school year, birthdays, and anniversaries. If you're reluctant to put on the hats or blow the noise makers, give them to a child near you. Kids are wired for joy. They can hardly wait to laugh and play. Watch how contagious this is! God is here! Celebrate! God has blessed us. Join in the merrymaking: celebrate life; celebrate God's love!

The church at play, the church that parties, the church that celebrates God's grace and the goodness of life – that's a new image for most of us! In today's readings the kingdom of God is pictured as a wedding feast and a family reunion. Evidently God is into the party thing. It's easy to get caught up in these images of food, drink, merriment, the richness of relationships, and the goodness of life. Who doesn't enjoy such times? Everyone is invited; everyone is welcomed. There's more than enough for everyone. God's goodness and grace abound. All we need to do is show up and enjoy. Here's the other thing: We don't have to wait until the end of life to enjoy the party! We get to taste and see the goodness of God every day. Life is the banquet, the party, the feast. God has spread it out before us and invites us to come, eat, and drink!

The party begins in this space as we gather around the Table of the Lord to feast on God's presence and Christ's promise to be with us always. This is what is most important in our lives – connecting with God – feasting on the Bread of Life. Nothing substitutes for this. Remember what's it like returning to our parents after being away for a while - how they come out to greet us; hugs and smiles abound? So God welcomes us home. The story Jesus tells in Luke 15 indicates that God is so happy to see us that he runs out to greet us, throws his arms around us, and calls everyone to join in a feast celebrating our return. My son, my daughter who was lost, separated, absent for a while has returned. All is forgiven. We're together. Life is good. Come, eat, and drink!

Then the party spills over into the west courtyard of our church as we feast together on food and fellowship; daily bread and relationships we need to nourish and sustain us; people who add richness to life. We talk and laugh; we share life while our children play. Life is good. God blesses us through this community. We find encouragement and strength for the journey ahead. Come, eat, and drink!

Finally, the party moves out into the community where we become bread for the world. Through our lives – broken, wounded, imperfect, restored, healed, forgiven – God's love is made known to others. We are the ones who invite people to taste and see the goodness of the Lord. We are the ones through whom God brings hope and healing. We are the ones in whom and through whom God blesses the world.

Lelia Moore, an FLC member who serves as the Congregational Nurse Coordinator in the Moses Cone Health System, tells the following story. On a Tuesday morning 2 weeks ago, a distraught teenage mother got on a city bus with her 4 month old baby in Southeast Greensboro. She changed buses and rode until the end of the route in western Greensboro, an area she was unfamiliar with. She began walking the streets with her baby past houses, apartment complexes and businesses trying to figure out what she was going to do. After a while, she walked past a church. Although she was not churched, she had been told that churches were safe places where people are loving and kind.

The young mother knocked on the door and the secretary answered. The young woman told the secretary that she needed help. She was afraid that she had hurt her baby and she didn't know what to do. The young mother had no way of knowing that this church had a Congregational Nurse. The secretary invited the young mother in and called the nurse and asked if she could come to the church and talk with the mother. The nurse came and in talking with the mother found that she had hit her baby that morning in frustration leaving a large bruise. The mother relayed that she and her baby were currently living with her mother, who was working multiple jobs to keep their family afloat. So she was alone with her child most of the time.

The Congregational Nurse spent the next 6 hours being with the mother and baby as she took them to the ER, worked with the police and DSS Child Protective Services. In the end, the child had no injuries except for the

bruise. DSS agreed to release the child back to the mother and grandmother with supervision and the promise that the mother would attend parenting classes. In sharing this story, the Congregational Nurse talked of how God uses us in ways that we can never imagine. What was the likelihood that the young family would board a bus on the other side of town, knock on the door of this church and find the nurse? She knew that for the young mother that day, she represented the tangible hands and arms of God offering her grace. In that moment, the nurse was God's bread, God's provision for that woman and child. The relationship continues and the mother and child seem to be doing well. Come, eat, and drink! Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

This is the party to which you and I and all people are invited. It is the feast of life, the abundant life, where God provides through people like you and me what each of us needs in order to be sustained. The Bread of Life enters our life so that we might be bread for the world.