

**"A Feast Day"**  
The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost  
Proper 23  
Trinity+St. Peter's Episcopal Church  
San Francisco, California

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Isaiah 25:1-9  
Psalm 23  
Philippians 4:1-9  
St. Matthew 22:1-14

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**A Feast at the Home-coming**

The Twenty-Third Psalm is so familiar to us, that it tumbles off our tongues without even engaging our brain or thoughts about it. The first part of the psalm is about the shepherd who leads the people into abundance, but from what? Probably written during the period of time when the peoples of Judah and Israel return to the land of their fathers and mothers after being in exile in foreign lands, the first part of the psalm celebrates their return, led by God. Dangers and troubles are encountered, but God leads the to safety.

In the reading from Isaiah we hear his thoughts on the troubles encountered by Judah and Israel in the threats from foreign invaders. Isaiah sees the foreign rules as the agents of God, wreaking havoc on those that had forgotten God, or the covenant with God. The realities of war were seen as God's visitation upon them. But even in that event God has mercy, and deals with his people. Here's how Isaiah saw it:

*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.*

God relents of his judgment upon Israel, and reverses the evil that had been sent upon the people. In the psalm it is described as the "valley of the shadow of death." But that is all past. God welcomes God's people to the covenant made with them, the partnership that was seen as being made with the ancients, with Abraham and with Sarah.

It is the last part of the psalm that like the final verses of the Isaiah reading captures the psychology of return most potently – it describes a feast at the return. Isaiah pictures a rather elaborate affair, a feast on the mountain. It is a feast of "rich food and of the finest wines." Psalm 23 has a feast at the end in a much simpler setting. It is in green pastures, a feast set in the presence of enemies – even they will know that God has redeemed the people. There is anointing and there is healing. "And goodness and mercy shall follow."

## **A Feast for all Peoples**

But there is more. There is a reality that is expressed not only in Isaiah, but also in the Gospel for today. Isaiah sees as a feast that is prepared not only for Israel, but for all peoples. Yes, the disgrace of Israel is wiped away, but the feast is for all peoples. It is here that Isaiah begins to recognize that God calls all the nations to God's promises. Jesus has the same message in his parable about the wedding feast. When those who were invited shun the invitation, God sends servants out to the highways and byways to invite any and everyone to the feast. It is a reality that needs to be realized by everyone – by those who think their race is the only one invited to the feast – by those in the Holy Land who cannot recognize the brother or sister who has been invited to the feast – for those in the church who think that they are the only one invited to the feast, or that their feast is the most legitimate feast. God invites us all.

## **Being Prepared for the Feast**

Being invited is not enough, however. One must recognize who has done the inviting, the One who has provided the meal of grace. In Jesus parable of the wedding feast, at the end, we meet a character at the feast who doesn't know where he is, or how to show a decent level of respect. He comes without the wedding garment. The lesson here for us is not one of discerning proper dress on the part of those who come here, but rather that our welcome to them portrays the importance of the feast – that Christ is present in the feast for them and for us. This is the gospel message that ought to greet anyone who comes to the table with us – the message of grace and forgiveness.

## **A Feast of Peace**

Finally, we need to recognize that the feast that Isaiah, the psalmist, and Jesus talk about is a feast that follows war and destruction. As we read our newspapers each day, we see that they are filled with wars and rumors of wars. The promise that God makes is one that follows our loving of our neighbor, of forgiving our enemy, of coming together at the feast. And so we pray for all the parties, all the soldiers, all the victims, all the perpetrators, all the people. We pray for them, and invite them to the feast that is spread before us in peace.

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