

The Second Sunday after Trinity  
10 June, Anno Domini 2018  
St. Luke 14:15-24  
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

One of the most difficult doctrines to understand and, really, accept by faith, is the doctrine of election. It is clearly taught by our Lord in Scripture and therefore it is necessary for faith and so worthy of our study. It is also a doctrine that is easily and often hijacked by our reason and so badly misunderstood, leading some to wrong faith and others completely away from faith in Christ. As with so many things, what God gives for our good, we, in our sin, pervert and use to our harm. It is no less true of this glorious and comforting doctrine. And this doctrine is of such importance that the writers of the Formula of Concord found it necessary to spend a great deal of time correctly teaching it from the Scriptures against those who sought to pervert it. May the Lord grant us heavenly wisdom and hearts of faith so that we might receive the comfort of the Gospel which is found in the doctrine of election.

Election, or predestination, as it is clearly taught in the Scriptures, is revealed to us only in terms of the elect, those who will enter into the marriage feast of the Lamb in heaven. The Lord speaks concerning those whom He has chosen. It is absolutely necessary that we rightly understand that. Understanding who the elect are and how they are counted among the elect does not give us authority or freedom to assume the same about the non-elect. When dealing with election we must stick only with what Christ has said in His Word and not seek to fill in the blanks. We cannot and should not try to delve into the secret counsel of God. God has clearly spoken what we need and what He has not revealed to us, we do not need to trouble ourselves with or seek to explain. The doctrine of election is revealed as a doctrine of comfort rooted in the Lord Jesus Christ and nowhere else.

What is probably the most common false teaching concerning election is what is known as double predestination. This teaching, found primarily among the reformed church bodies, states that God, before creation, looked into the future and decided sheerly on the basis of His sovereign right to do so, who would be saved and who wouldn't. Whatever the basis

of that decision, be it faith or man's works or simply God's capriciousness, it completely nullifies the Gospel and the forgiveness of our sins in Jesus. It also stands in direct contradiction to the clear word of God which says that He desires that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. If God chooses us because we believe then we are saved because of what we did, not what Christ did. Such an understanding of predestination also breeds the false teaching of man's free will in spiritual matters. It would also mean that God chose for some to not be saved, which contradicts God's own word. Double predestination is man's attempt to reconcile what he sees with what he hears in Scripture and to make God fit what man is able to understand. It goes like this. I see that not all people are saved. I read in Scripture that election is God's work. Logic says that if God chose some for salvation, then He necessarily had to choose for others not to be saved. If A is true then B must be true also. The problem is that our Lord never said that.

Thus our parable today. The feast is prepared. "Everything is now ready," the man said. Salvation is accomplished for all by Christ and is available to all in Christ. It is not a limited atonement. It is only in Christ but the death of God's Son was the payment for all sin - everyone's, whether they enter eternal life in the end or not. God sincerely invites all to believe and receive this great gift. There is no work for the invitees to do other than show up and eat. The feast of salvation is prepared by the man, not the guests. This points to the monergistic nature of salvation, that is, that our salvation is, from start to finish, completely the work of one, namely God. Then the invitation is issued. It is a sincerely meant invitation. It isn't falsely sent out. Every time the invitation is made, every time the Gospel is proclaimed, God is making known His will to all who hear. He is declaring again, His desire to save any and all who will come. Some did. Not all.

Not all who heard the Word, not all who hear of the forgiveness of sins in Christ, believe. Is that the fault of the one who invited them? Is the man to be blamed that His invitation was rejected? And then, when those first men refused, the invitation was extended to every nook and cranny because the gracious master wanted everyone to enjoy and benefit from the feast. The feast was available to all who believed the invitation and came. But it was not forced upon anyone. It was strongly urged, as the servants of God with great zeal urge all to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

The responsibility for damnation lies solely with those who refuse the invitation. It is not God's fault. They heard and they refused. Thus the Jews who refused Jesus, who refused the gracious call of God to trust in Him for salvation, stood condemned - not because God wanted them condemned, but because they would not receive God in the way that He came - to show mercy to sinners. They trusted in themselves. They rejected the means by which God saves us. This is the Word of warning from our Lord. Salvation is a gift given by our Lord. It is not accomplished or even received on our own terms in the way or the time which we choose. It is the Lord's salvation. He alone died. He alone bore the judgment of sin. And He alone has determined how that salvation would be made available to man. The hungry person who spurns the free gift of a meal because he didn't choose the restaurant, is rightly considered a fool and left to be hungry. How foolish is man when eternal life is offered as a free gift of God's mercy in Christ, and we turn up our noses? The reason doesn't matter. Whether it's because we believe that salvation can't or shouldn't be a gift or simply because we are too preoccupied with the foolish things of this world - if we will not receive forgiveness and life as God offers it to us, then we alone are responsible for our damnation. No one else and certainly not God.

And yet how often we do. How often we hear the invitation to the feast of our salvation and we make excuses. And, let's be clear, none of the excuses given are legitimate. They only sound pious. In truth, just like all the excuses we give, they are impious. They betray the unbelief that lurks in our flesh which says "I don't need what my Lord offers. I don't really need grace because I'm not that bad a person." We foolishly imagine that because we once heard the invitation and came, we are fine. We don't take seriously the great danger that lies around us on a daily basis. If we truly believed that we daily sinned much and certainly deserved nothing but God's wrath and displeasure, if we truly lamented the sin and brokenness that afflict us and our neighbor, the invitation to salvation and the peace of God which passes all human understanding would sound like the sweetest music in our ears and we would be knocking people down to get to the dinner table.

Notice who responded to the messengers' invitation. It was the poor and crippled and lame. It is the ones who hunger and thirst for righteousness that rejoice in the Gospel's invitation to the banquet of Christ's Body and Blood. These are the elect. They hear the Gospel, which has been

proclaimed to all, and they know their need, they believe the invitation and gladly come seeking the gifts of Christ. Those who don't come, who hear the same invitation and reject it, will only know God's anger and judgment. And one day, there will be no more invitation. The time of God's grace will draw to an end and those who thought they would come later when they had more time and fewer other things to do will forever suffer the deep anger and sadness of damnation.

On the other hand, the elect daily take comfort in being the Baptized, cleansed and restored to God by His mercy. They long for God's favor and in the pure preaching of God's Word, hear His gracious invitation to salvation. When the invitation goes out, they come, not because they are better, but because they know their need and acknowledge that they don't deserve such an invitation. They aren't invited because they have earned it or because they are somehow more worthy than others. They are invited because the Lord is gracious and desires that they too be saved.

The question always arises "How do I know if I am among the elect?" The answer isn't to look at yourself or the fruit you are or aren't producing. The answer is to look at Christ, the way by which God has offered salvation to the whole world. Are you a sinner who needs God's forgiveness? If so, do you believe that the Blood of God's Son was spilled for you, as He Himself declared and promised in your Baptism? Do you desire to receive the Holy Communion of Christ's Body and Blood which He gives to all who believe and confess these words "given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins"? If the answer is yes then you are among the elect. Rejoice! The status of the elect is built on Christ, not on the elect. God wants you at His table.

And what of those who don't believe? They have heard the same preaching and the invitation but they have arrogantly refused it. They have failed to listen to God's wisdom and instead turned to lady Folly who promises pleasure and happiness but delivers only death to all who turn in and seek after her. May God graciously preserve us from unbelieving and callous hearts who neither hunger nor thirst for the gracious gifts of salvation which our Lord freely offers to all.

And, may God grant us true wisdom, the wisdom of Christ, that we may all hear the gracious invitation to His banquet and respond in faith and so

count ourselves among the elect who enjoy the peace and the comfort of Christ Jesus.

In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.