

# Congregational Church of the Messiah

September 7, 2008

## “All Are Invited—No Excuses!”

Luke 14:16-24

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We all like to receive invitations.

When we are invited to someone's home for dinner, we know that person values us and wants us to come to his or her home. It feels good to be included in the list of persons to be welcomed for a special occasion.

Jesus said that entering the kingdom of heaven is like being invited to a friend's house. God is the generous Host, inviting us to His heavenly banquet. We each receive the invitation to come and share the banquet as one of God's invited guests. True to real life, the invitation often comes when we are not expecting it. Actually, we may have other plans.

In today's scripture, the response to God's invitation was to find a way not to go and not to offend the generous Host in the process.

Instead of changing other things to make room for the generous Host's invitation, we make up excuses. We can become ever so creative about excuses, which actually cover up our preference to give our time to something else.

There is a difference between a valid explanation and a made-up excuse. After my recent surgery, I still am not able to return to everything I had been doing. We usually know the difference between a real excuse and a fictional one, but we still often avoid things by making up excuses, somehow thinking the person giving the invitation will accept them.

That is how the invited guests treated the invitation from the Generous Host. Jesus said the guests simply chose to do other things. One man claim he needed to check out a new piece of property that he had purchased. What a silly excuse! Most people look over real estate *before* ever paying for it—not after money has been paid.

Another had just bought a pair of oxen and said he had to try them out and couldn't attend the banquet. Today who buys a used car *before* even taking it for a drive?

Another guest had just gotten married. In Jesus' day that meant the bridegroom had one-full-year's exemption from military service but not from other responsibilities. He could have attended the banquet but simply did not want to. God sees through our silly excuses and can tell when we truly want to come and when we do not.

## All Are Invited

No one can do everything, so one has to make choices—just like the invited guests in “The Parable of the Great Banquet.” The Generous Host had selected each person. A place had been set for each invited guest at the banquet table.

When something we are really excited about or is vitally important to us, we reorganize our regular schedule to make it so we can attend. God knows we all have other things we can do. Perhaps God sends out the invitation to each of us to come to His banquet to see how we will respond. Where is God in our list of priorities?

Now put yourself in the place of the generous host who went to all the trouble and expense of deciding to have a banquet, selecting a certain number of people to come and eat the food, enjoy each other’s company, perhaps be entertained. The house is decorated; the wide assortment of rich food and fruits is prepared; and then but no one shows up. As a host, how would you respond?

Jesus said the Generous Host told his servants to go out and invite whomever they met to come on in and enjoy His banquet. There were still some empty places so the Host sent the servants back out again to bring in anyone and everyone they could find. He wanted each seat at the table to be filled even though the first invited guests did not believe it was worth their time to come.

This third response shows the nature of the Host. Not only is God generous, but He is opening the kingdom of heaven to all those who are hungry and will come to His table.

We do not always have to “seek” the kingdom of heaven. Sometimes God Himself sends invitations to us to come and follow Him

in service to others,  
in prayer for those in crisis or confusion,  
in thoughtful actions that draw people closer to God  
giving them a higher value of themselves.

Consider ourselves. Not many of us are rich, or famous, or of royal blood, and yet Christ gave Himself for us—not that we loved God but that God first loved us.

The invitation God sends to us includes our being part of God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven where there is peace, joy, harmony, beauty and majesty. That is where we participate in the Oneness of Life that is beyond description. We have that invitation from God waiting on the doorstep of our consciousness each morning when we awake. It is a brand new day, and we can rejoice and thank God for it.

Each day brings with it the gift and responsibility of making choices: to be happy or sad, angry or cheerful, positive or negative, feeling sorry for ourselves or focusing outward

## **All Are Invited**

and helping someone else to smile. We are invited by God to make each day a good day lived for the Lord.

God gives good gifts to us even when we do not consciously seek first His kingdom because God is the Generous Host who wants you and me eventually to fill our seats at His heavenly banquet table.

Let's not disqualify ourselves by turning away every time the invitation comes. Let's not make up silly excuses about why we do not have even ten minutes or more to spend quietly with our God. Of course, God values you enough to allow you to make the choice with the undeniable caveat that *if* you choose to come to Him and follow His ways, there will be blessings for you far beyond anything you can imagine. Perhaps by accepting the invitation today, you will have a much better day than expected.

We begin a new church year with regularly scheduled meetings to plan and carry out the work of the church for the coming year. In addition, there will be study groups and fellowship times that will enrich your life. Many invitations are included in this September's *Messiah Messenger*. I hope you will choose to accept each invitation that interests you, that you will grow in your wisdom about God, your understanding of yourself, and the knowledge of how to become part of God's kingdom here on earth.

Amen.