

Sermon - May 19, 2019 -- Easter 5

## Wedding Crashers!

Acts 11:1–18

Introduction:

Dear Friends in Christ

What do you do with Wedding Crashers? Sometimes they are resented, these people where not part of the guest list, and perhaps we don't even know them. But, other will welcome them no problem.

It was a lovely wedding ceremony, most of the invited guests where there at the church, and a couple hours later, they will be at the reception too. This was a wedding that took place here in GP almost 20 years ago. The reception was at the Five Mile hall. There were about 150 confirmed guests. So, the food, drinks, the tables and seating arrangements were set for that amount of guests. Of course, the bride and groom, in their planning set aside a few seats and extra food for those who didn't confirm their participation but will show up. And so, at the set time the reception started, the party was going well, most of the people were eating already, but almost at the end of the line of guests getting their food from the buffet table that the wedding crashers begin to appear, friends of the couple brought other friends, who also brought other friends. So in total there about 50 or so people that yes, we consider them as the wedding crashers. Of course, there was no more food, so quick trips were made to KFC. And so, the proper etiquette of the reception with the proper planned meal was thrown out the window, from a wonderful and exquisite roast beef to KFC fast food. From the lovely china, to paper plates, from proper forks to plastic ones. Imagine all the planning that the reception took, to turn out like that. But in the end, everybody, including the wedding crashers had a blast.

Something of that nature is taking place in one of our readings for this morning, from the book of Acts chapter 11.

There the church faces issues of proper religious etiquette if you will. There were people of different kind joining the church, to the Jew's they were sort of wedding crushers, they were not to be included in the proper church. In including them issues arouse, the issue of circumcision and unclean foods. In fact the problem of non inclusion in the "common" still continues even today with the division we ourselves create, be it religious, language, color, territory, or even social status, and unless they become like us at least in some ways, we exclude them, even if they are believers as well.

However, the Bible tells us that that God does not discriminate, and His children shouldn't either. For God's grace and promise go to all, and binds all who believe, together, in His Church, and he does independently of who they are.

But it seems that we don't always do what we are supposed to do. Right? Just like what happened to Peter in our bible text. As you see, Peter had gone to those who where outside of what was common, the Gentiles. A gentile is a person other than a Jew, and when Peter ministered to them, his actions were called into question, he was in trouble.

Now, the Jews Christian leaders had some bases for doing so. In the Old Testament there was a prescription for the Jews to be different from the Gentiles. (Deut

7:1–6). Jews felt even eating with Gentiles would make them ceremonially unclean. God even forbid them to eat many foods the Gentiles ate (Deut 14:2–19).

But now, with the arrival of Christ, a New Church and a new nation springs us up, something New begun. The creation of a people that is holy in Christ, and that people empowered by Christ will welcome everybody, from every tribe, language and color, meeting them at where they are, making their lives new, changing their core values, making them totally new. Just as God who “was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” (Rev 21:5) This is good news!

It is good news because, God does welcomes even “wedding crashers,” those who are different, he does it here, and now. Through his church, after all it is here where it takes place, because once in heaven, now there, there will be no possibility to crash heaven. Unless a person goes through Jesus, there is no other way to enter heaven. But going to Heaven happens even now, as we are the Church, the militant Church, the church that is preparing for Heaven.

Even so, we are being made new in Christ. And it is in this newness of being Luther says, “we are to be Little Christs to those around us.” But in order for us to be a little Christ to somebody else, we need to learn what and how Christ did. And during His ministry on earth we see Jesus eating with sinners and the unlikely, Jesus cared about the person after all He was going to die for that person, it didn’t matter to Him where that person came from, or where that person have been, but that a New person might come. That’s in fact the mission of the Church and should be the fact of matter of what we do as congregation, and we are to be constantly reminded of this truth!

Because, as it happens, we constantly lose sight of what is important, of what our mission is.

So this morning we pause again, and ask ourselves how have we welcomed those “wedding crashers,” those who are different than us? After all, we too have been like “wedding crashers” at some point. We too didn’t fit in God’s Church, we were like the Gentiles to the Jews, all because we were without Christ. But in baptism we have made one with each other, in Christ.

So, are we intentionally actively seeking others to be incorporated into our “party”?

Or do we allow other things to hinder that mission? You know we are prone to get hung onto other things, secondary things that might be or not be so important or relevant to the Gospel, but we make it to be. Our comfort zone for example, can keep us from inviting others. Our traditions are another thing. The things we like a certain way and if others don’t act in the same way we tend not to pay any attention, right?

But, the problem is that many a times we miss the point, we miss the person for whom Jesus died on the cross of Calvary, not only us, but even those who are still in darkness. We cut short the power of the Gospel by not trusting its power.

Friends are our holding on to the Scriptures as the inerrant word of God is crucial for our faith and ultimately for salvation, and by extension our confessions, crucially important? Absolutely, yet and sometimes that in itself can become a hindrance too. While holding on to a true confession of faith is of utmost importance, it is also of utmost importance the practicality of that confession, which includes, our response to His call of bringing others in the “proper” of who we are in the Kingdom of the Lord. And by doing so we highlight the power of what we believe. Didn’t Paul say it so? “I am not

ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. <sup>17</sup> For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” (Rom. 1:16-17).

Another way of hindering the welcome of “crashers” is our emotion. There is something funny and ironic in what we do and what we say. Sometimes we hear that church and faith is not about emotions or feelings. Yet when it comes to sharing our faith, and giving a testimony of our faith, what is it that we say? I don’t fill like it! Right? Let’s go to church on Sunday! “Well I don’t feel like it.” Now those things are emotions, don’t you say? So, what’s the difference, some equate faith with emotions, and others their emotions prevent them from faith and spiritual growth.

Friends, our Lord makes us very clear, as He did with Peter that God purposes to include everyone, in and outside of what we think is “proper.” Even if they are, yet God is the one who makes them “proper.” God confirmed it to Peter by a vision which Peter tells in his defense when the Christian Jew leaders in Jerusalem gave him a hard time because he “went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.” (V.3)

This what he said: “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. <sup>6</sup> I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the air. <sup>7</sup> Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’ <sup>8</sup> “I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ <sup>9</sup> “The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ <sup>10</sup> This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.” (Vs. 5–10).

With this God left no doubt of His purpose. In verses 15–17 Peter tells us: “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. <sup>16</sup> Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ <sup>17</sup> So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?”

Isn’t this new thing God begun doing in Christ great? God includes all people by the testimony of his Word, into the Kingdom. Just as the Psalmist prophesied: “kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, <sup>12</sup> young men and maidens, old men and children. <sup>13</sup> Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.” (Ps 148:11–13).

This new thing God begun to do is great, for those who feel rejected by the world, but their sins, by satan, by those who hold power over them, and even rejected by their own people will find solace, acceptance and more importantly a new life in God’s family the church, all because with Jesus death, destroyed all barriers that sin puts in our midst’s, all our divisions and even our wrong priorities and the self made obstacles for others to join God’s church. As the apostle says: “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1 Jn 2:2)

By His cross, the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life have been given to all who believe (v 17), that is worth sharing with others!

Now, just to make sure, this new thing is active here and now, whether it’s infant Baptism or adults coming to faith, all are by God’s Spirit through his Word. It is God working here and there, and here and there He uses us to proclaim His Gospel.

It is not what we do that will accomplish this mission, but it is Him through us, who has chosen us, who has given us freedom and a new life. It is Him using us to be little Christs to one another, it is Him welcoming us into His Kingdom, sending us to bring others into it as well.

Conclusion: When we come to Christ's Church, really, it is crucial to remember that we don't really make up the guest list, we are more like "wedding Crashers." Yet Jesus welcomes us, and doesn't end there, He just doesn't accommodate us, but declares and brings us to be his guests at the heavenly table, and he always does, only because of his grace, and in his grace gives us life. There is a heavenly celebration, let's like the friend of a friend, bring somebody else. After all, Jesus, he just may be bringing other guests to the table with him. Like the holiday meal to which some outside the family are invited, it's something new for us to get used to. Regardless, we rejoice because we are with Jesus, he has welcomed us.