

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
All Saints' Day
November 3, 2024
Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl
Feast Forever with Death Devoured

On this mountain the LORD of Armies will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food, a banquet of aged wines, with the best cuts of meat, and with the finest wines.⁷ On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that covers all peoples, the burial cloth stretched over all nations. ⁸ He has swallowed up death forever! The LORD God will wipe away the tears from every face. He will take away the shame of his people throughout the earth. For the LORD has spoken. ⁹ On that day it will be said, "Look, here is our God! We waited for him, and he saved us! This is the LORD! We waited for him. Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation!"

—Isaiah 25:6-9 EHV

I have been asked to give you an invitation. It's right here. This is what it says: "You are invited! The heavenly Father invites *you* to the banquet celebration of his Son at the end of the world that you may feast forever."

Are you going? Are you looking forward to the great banquet? Are you excited about it? Me too.

Banquets have been associated with joyful events such as weddings or celebrations. You and I can easily picture them. The aroma of cooked meats and vegetables, the bustling sounds from a busy kitchen, the sight of brightly decorated tables with floral arrangements, the touch of linen napkins, the smoothest, crispest wines, and, of course, the taste of seasoned and spicy foods. It just makes your mouth water thinking about it, doesn't it?

Different occasions call for having banquets. Weddings, birthday parties, confirmations, football parties. We can think of many different reasons for gathering together and having a feast placed before us. Well, today, I would like to paint for you another reason to have a banquet. A war has ended, and the warriors are coming home.

Have you ever been in a war? I have not. In a week from Monday, we will celebrate Veteran's Day, and some of you veterans may have fought in a war. I've never been in a war, but I have to believe that war, any war, has to be the closest experience to hell without experiencing hell itself. Bloodshed is all around you. People's lives are displaced and in shambles. The wilderness of dirt and dust is only part of the emptiness that they feel inside. Do soldiers see hope? Do they see an end? Do they ever know if they will gather around a banquet table with family and friends again? Will there ever be another banquet for them to come to?

We certainly give thanks for the men and women who have served or who are serving in our nation's armed forces to protect the freedom that we have. We give thanks to the police officers and public servants who keep us safe.

But here's the picture I want to paint for you today. Imagine being on a battlefield. You see bloodshed and death all around you. And then you receive an invitation. It's an invitation announcing a celebration, a banquet of joy and peace. What would that be like? "The war is over. Come home. Join us for a banquet at the most prestigious mansion. Only the finest foods and drinks will be served. This is an invitation to you all."

I would imagine that the soldiers would look forward to the great banquet. They would be excited about it. They would joyfully spread the news. The buzz would go through the ranks. No more war, only a great banquet feast.

These are some of the pictures that the prophet Isaiah gives to us in chapter 25 of his book. God revealed to Isaiah things that would take place in the future. Isaiah looks into the future, and he sees a number of things. One of the things he sees is war. He sees destruction.

If you remember some of the context in which Isaiah wrote, he was preaching to people who would soon see warfare and heartache. In a little more than 100 years from when Isaiah wrote, the king of Babylon was going to march into Jerusalem and take 10,000 of Judah's finest into captivity. Fifteen years later he was going to come back and destroy whatever was left: the temple, the people, the city. God the Holy Spirit led Isaiah to see all of this war and destruction clearly.

But Isaiah saw more than just Jewish exiles. He saw people who were trapped as Prisoners of War all over the world. And you and I were included in that vision. That's what sin does. That's what the devil does. They trap us. They enslave us. And the result of that captivity was a whole lot worse than a P.O.W. camp. Sin leads to an eternal hellish captivity.

That's the battlefield that you and I are on. Everyday is battle against our sinful flesh. It's not just our sinful thoughts, words, and actions that affect us. It's the fact that to the core of our being we have a sinful nature. I can't take it off like I can take off a shirt. No, it's a part of me. It's in my core. In one of our corporate confessions of sin, we say, "I confess that I am *by nature* sinful." That battle will continue all through this life.

And what we and every single person would rightly deserve because of that inbred sinful nature is a hellish captivity. Shackled and bound for eternity. Isaiah sees that in his book. *But* he also sees hope.

While you battle, you receive an invitation. In the midst of the warfare, Isaiah lifts our eyes to hope. He lifts our eyes to the source of hope and help. **“On this mountain the LORD of Armies will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food, a banquet of aged wines, with the best cuts of meat, and with the finest wines.”**

Here is your invitation. It is an invitation to a feast. The warfare will end. The destruction will cease. And a table elegantly prepared is placed before you.

When Isaiah saw a vision of this banquet feast, he was seeing more than just the captives returning from the war with Babylon. This is a banquet, a feast, that the **LORD of Armies** has prepared for all people. The invitation is for every single person in the world. No strings attached. The table is set. It is just an invitation to eat.

By God’s gracious revelation to us, you and I know what this feast is all about. We can easily see when the fullness of this prophecy will come true. Isaiah lifts our eyes to see the great banquet hall of heaven. The Lord has prepared for us a tremendous feast. No human being could ever imagine such a feast. Coming from the trenches of war, this feast is a welcomed sight. It is freely given. It is freely offered to you. The great banquet feast of heaven is for you.

Today, we remember our brothers and sisters in Christ who are sitting around the table at this great banquet feast. We remembered five of them today, actually six including Dolores Vande Vrede. They are the Saints Triumphant. They are feasting on this rich food and drink and enjoying the celebration.

But you and I do not have to wait to receive the food of this great feast. We enjoy its food right now. This is food for your souls. The Lord has prepared a feast for your lives. It’s found here. It’s found in the gospel in word and sacraments.

Sometimes our lives feel like the wilderness of dust and dirt, and we see nothing but filth. We know our wickedness, and our sins are always before us. We know that we deserve nothing but to be exiled and taken as captives away from God.

But we get a taste of that great banquet feast of heaven when we hear Jesus say, **“Father, forgive them.”** We get a soothing drink from the refreshing waters when God says, **“I forgive your wickedness and remember your sins no more.”**

There is a tremendous feast that is prepared for you. And Jesus dresses you for the occasion. He changes your clothes. He takes off your filthy rags, and he gives you his clothes of perfection. He says to us, **“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”** We get a taste of that great banquet feast in the forgiveness of sins that Jesus freely gives to us all.

There is hope. There is an end. There is joy. And the hope is found in the way the Lord blesses this feast. **“On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that covers all peoples, the burial cloth stretched over all nations. He has swallowed up death forever! The Lord God will wipe away the tears from every face. He will take away the shame of his people throughout the earth. For the Lord has spoken.”**

This is a very vivid picture for us. Have you ever attended the funeral of an unbeliever? It’s extremely sad. People try to console the bereaved with nice thoughts about the person who has died, but no real comfort can be given. People might say, “Oh, he lived a good life. He had a great business. He loved his family so much.” And then what? Where is he now? What happens when someone dies apart from the Lord? The Lord is very clear about what happens to those who die as unbelievers.

If you look at the context of Isaiah’s words, he actually gives a very graphic picture of those who are enemies of God. He describes God’s enemies as being trampled down in manure. It’s a graphic picture. These unbelievers swim in the manure trying to flee, but they cannot escape. God brought down their pride, laid them low, and brought them down to the very dust. Those unbelievers who have worked so hard to make a name for themselves in this life will see their destruction at the time of death. God is very serious about sin. And he will cast unbelievers away for all eternity. There is no hope or comfort at the funeral of an unbeliever.

But go to the funeral of a believer. Oh, we sometimes dress in black to funerals. Sometimes people wear veils. The picture that Isaiah gives with this feast, this good news feast, this forgiveness feast, is that the Lord lifts the veil. He devours something you would think is so disgusting to the taste. He devours death, and he swallows up the cause of death forever. **“He swallows up death forever.”** When you swallow something, it is gone. You can’t see it anymore.

Our Lord Jesus has devoured death and the cause of death. You and I will never face eternal death. We will never find ourselves swimming in the manure of hell because we have a white robe of righteousness. Jesus lifts the cause of death, he lifts sins off of us, by placing them on himself. He takes our filth and gives us his perfection.

We pray with the hymn writer, **“Jesus, thy blood and righteousness, my beauty are my glorious dress. With these before my God I’ll stand, when I shall reach the heavenly land.”**

And when we see a believer fall asleep in death, physical death, we know they will wake up to the full banquet feast of heaven. The apostle Paul so vividly mirrors these words when he says in 1 Corinthians 15, the great resurrection chapter, **“When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’”**

As we look at the resurrection of our Lord Jesus, we see the great blessings of this feast that the Lord has prepared. We will rise. We will live forever. We will join those who have gone before us at the great banquet hall of heaven.

And as a tender mother bends down to wipe the tears from the face of her child, so your loving Savior reaches down to you, gently touches your cheek, and lovingly wipes your tears away.

You and I will experience that fully when we pass from this life and arrive at our home. The war will be over. The party will begin. The feast is prepared. The banquet hall awaits your arrival.

But even as we look forward to the time when we will arrive at our great wedding feast, we have the best feast placed before us right now. We have the Lord’s words of comfort in the gospel. We can confidently say right now, **“Look, here is our God! We waited for him, and he saved us! This is the Lord! We waited for him. Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation!”**

The Lord has spoken. These are his promises. His invitation is for you. **Feast forever with death devoured.** May the throngs of joy rise up from this congregation. If you missed it the first time, listen again because this is your invitation: You are invited! The heavenly Father invites *you* to the banquet celebration of his Son at the end of the world that you may feast forever. Amen.