

Disclaimer: The following document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.

The Party Favor

Peter Hiatt @ The Sanctuary Downtown

August 14-15, 2010

[Opening Song: "All I Wanna Do" – Sheryl Crow]

Why would they sing a song like that for the offertory?

Well actually, I asked them to. You could consider it a confession.

For years I've listened to that song and fantasized about sitting at the bar on Santa Monica Boulevard, across from the car wash. I'd just like to hang out with William and Sheryl ... as long as they didn't know what I did for a living. If they did, that would probably wreck it for them, and for me.

You know, they accused Jesus of being "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors (thieves) and sinners." Well, Jesus was neither a glutton nor a drunkard, but He sure loved parties. And he was a friend to sinners ... sinless, but a friend of sinners.

How did He do that?

I had dinner with Desmond Tutu - winner of the Nobel peace Prize in 1984, the international icon of Grace, Archbishop of Cape Town, leader of the Anglican Church of South Africa, and worldwide pop icon. A world of wisdom... I could have asked him anything.

He came to my house for dinner, and I sat next to him. I partied with Desmond Tutu ... And I don't remember it!

One day, watching TV or something, Desmond Tutu was mentioned, and inadvertently my mom said, "He was such a nice man." And I said, "What are you talking about? You act like you know him." And she said, "Well, of course. He came to our house for dinner, and you sat next to him."

(My dad was a pastor, and working on some mission thing or something, and he brought Desmond Tutu home for dinner.)

That's huge... and so I wanted to remember that day. But I couldn't remember that day, even though I tried and tried to remember that day. Some time later, my mom said, "Oh come on, Peter ... don't you remember? That was the day Ladybug had her puppies." (Ladybug was our wiener dog.) And when mom said that... WOW, I suddenly remembered that day, and all about our wiener dog. But not the Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Mom said, "Oh yes, he was so understanding."

So you see, I could have talked with him about Apartheid, the wonder of Christ's Gospel, and the world that was His heart... but if I talked to him, it was probably about wiener dogs.

Nothing against wiener dogs, but you see I missed Desmond Tutu because I was thinking about my wiener dog. I was invited to the banquet, but missed the meal. I had no appetite for what was being served, and so I missed the party... even though the party was at hand.

Isn't it ironic that most folks think that the mission of the church is to, like, help people avoid parties, when Scripture is just packed with parties? As I've told you, there's something like 80 days of commanded feasting per year in the Old Testament. 80 days! And one day of commanded fasting. One day. Every Sabbath was a to be a feast ... a party that anticipated God's rest – that day, the 7th day, the Kingdom of God.

In Deuteronomy 14, God commands all Israel to take 1/10 of their annual income each year, and throw a party – "Strong drink, and whatever your appetite craves."

Party.

"All I wanna do is have a little fun before I die," says the man next to me, out of nowhere.

But God seems to want us to have a LOT of fun... both now, and long after we die. All Israel knew that God was about parties, and all those parties were an anticipation of the Great Party, "The Messianic Banquet."

[Isaiah 25:6]

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations.

A veil blinds the nations to this banquet. In the temple on Mt. Zion, the worshipers were commanded to feast before the inner sanctuary, and the veil which separated the people from the glory of God.

A priest might pass through the veil, but only after the proper ritual on the day of Atonement, and only if he wasn't blemished, crippled, lame, blind ... disfigured. Isn't that weird? It's like those things kept them from the party. Well, Isaiah continues:

He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.

It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

So where will this party be? At the sanctuary. And when will this party be? That day the people say, "Behold, this is our God, we have waited for Him, that He might save us. This is the Lord... let us be glad and rejoice in His salvation!" At the sanctuary, when they see His salvation, and rejoice in His salvation.

In Luke 14, Jesus goes to a party – a banquet on the Sabbath at the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees. Next week, we're going to have a party, and I really want you to invite people... especially people who can't pay and can't repay. Jesus even tells you to invite them and pay for their lunch. We're taking a 2-week break from the Gospel of John to preach on The Party, and how to party.

It's really a story within a story, and we'll work from the inside out. In Luke 14, Jesus goes to this party at the Pharisee's house, and the first thing He does is heal a man with "dropsy," that is, edema. He's probably a bit disfigured – "plain ugly to me" – and lame. He was hanging around the edge of the party.

Well, the religious leaders are obviously offended at this man and at Jesus' kindness, so Jesus sends the man home. Then those religious leaders start competing for places of honor at the banquet. Jesus says, "When you throw a dinner party, invite the poor, crippled, blind, and lame." In other words, "Invite people like the man with dropsy, who we just sent away. Invite people like William at the bar in Santa Monica. Invite people who can't repay you, and you will be blessed. If they can't repay you, the banquet is Grace, and you will be happy.

Well, obviously uncomfortable, and trying to sound all religious, one of the Pharisees pontificates, "Right, Jesus... well blessed and happy is he who shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God." And Jesus tells a story – a story within the story:

[Luke 14:16]

Jesus said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come'."

Another said, "Sorry, my wiener dog just had puppies."

The servant gets nothing but excuses from people who've already said that they'd come to the banquet.

In that day, when a host gave a banquet, he'd send out invitations in advance, and based on the response, he'd slaughter the appropriate animal. The morning of the feast, he'd prepare the meat; when it was ready, he'd send his servant out into the village to all those invited, saying, "Come for all is now ready."

This servant says, "Come, all is now ready. It is finished." And they make excuses... lame excuses... lies.

Nobody inspects a field after they buy it.
Nobody tests oxen he already owns.
And so what if he married a wife? Bring her with you.

Ironically, these guests must be mentally crippled, even blind, to turn down such a great banquet. And all their "excuses" are lame.

The truth is they don't want to go to the banquet, for they have no appetite for what's being served.

Check it out... These Pharisees are sitting at a banquet on the Sabbath – the 7th day – with the Messiah. He's just healed a man. They say they've "received the invitation" to the Messianic Banquet; that they believe the Law and Prophets. But now the Servant of God is with them, and they won't come ... won't eat.

This Pharisee blurts out, "Happy are those who eat bread in the Kingdom of God."
Kingdom of God...
Jesus is the King, and He's already preached, "The Kingdom of God is at hand."
And Jesus tells us, "I Am the Bread of Life."

They're at the Party and they won't party.
They're at the Banquet, and they just won't eat.

The truth is they have no appetite for what's being served.
Who does?

Jesus continues:

"So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame'."

Well, the poor, crippled, blind, and lame would have a taste for the banquet... or at least, the poor, crippled, blind, and lame who admit they are poor, crippled, blind, and lame.

A Pharisee refuses to admit that he is poor, crippled, blind, and lame.
A Pharisee works like crazy to convince himself and his world that he has no deficiency, and is already full – already righteous.

But if you think you are righteous, you can't hunger and thirst for righteousness.
"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," said Jesus.

The Law points out our emptiness, our appetite for righteousness. But a Pharisee feeds on Law to convince himself he's already full. And so, he has no appetite for Grace – the righteousness that is God.

Jesus continues:

“And the servant said, ‘Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’ And the master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.’”

Ever? We ask.

Well, the Prophets prophecy that one day Jerusalem and Israel will be humbled by a great sign, and come home to the Banquet. But now they cannot and will not taste the Banquet. And so the master says, “Go to the highways and hedges.”

The hedges, where you'd find thieves and sinners and women caught in adultery, and the highways, where you'd find Romans and Gentiles. Highways, like Santa Monica Boulevard.

The servant will go there, and “compel” them to come in. This Banquet is so good and so free, it's unbelievable. So the servant will compel them to believe. For us, the relentless, unbounded, furious and unconditional Love that is God is so good it's unbelievable without the Servant of God who compels us to believe.

Jesus is the “Servant of God,” and He compels us to believe by offering Himself to us and for us on the cross.

He is the Bread of Life and the Banquet of Grace prepared by God on Mt. Zion.

He is the Passover Feast and Sabbath Feast, and every feast that is any feast.

He is the Life ... the Life of the Party.

He is “what's for dinner”: Body broken and Blood shed.

He exalts the humble with the Mercy that is Himself, and He humbles the exalted with His Mercy, that they might one day receive the Mercy that is Himself.

The Pharisee said, “Happy is he who eats bread in the Kingdom of God.” And yet, he wouldn't “eat bread in the Kingdom of God.” He was already full of himself – pride.

So...

#1. He couldn't or wouldn't see the Bread that is Jesus.

#2. He couldn't see the broken bread that took the form of that disfigured and lame man whom Jesus healed.

He was alone.

Have you ever contemplated the fact that there is literally a world inside of every person you meet – just like the world inside of you? Nothing tangible is as utterly fascinating as another person.

You are utterly occupied with all the complexities of you, and yet that world of complexity lies in everyone you meet. Every person is a banquet of wonder.

So, in our spare time, we watch TV shows about persons, we read books about persons, we talk about persons ... but we're terrified to get too close to persons. Just like the priests were terrified to go behind the veil that covered the Sanctuary and the Holy Place... the Life of the party.

According to Scripture, a living person is like a bag of dust that contains a breath from our Holy God – a spirit. John tells us that Christ is the Word; words ride on breath. And Christ is the “Light that enlightens all men.”
All men.

In Galatians 1:16, Paul writes that when it pleased God, He revealed His Son in Paul – like Christ had been hiding there all along. Certainly God baptizes us and fills us with His Holy Spirit at a point in time, and yet that breath –in some form – must be there all along.

And so each person is like a portal to eternity, our God, and His Kingdom. Remember it is Jesus that will say, “As you did it not to the least of these, you did it not to me.”
And that's why the 2nd greatest commandment – “Love your neighbor” – is like the first: “Love God.” Because God is somehow in your neighbor ... hidden in your neighbor, like treasure in a field or glory in an earthen vessel.

And that would mean...

Dinner with anyone is dinner with someone far more fascinating than Desmond Tutu. So are you missing the party?
Dinner with anyone can be the Great Banquet.

Jesus took bread and broke it saying, “This is my Body given to you. Eat it.”

Then St. Paul reveals that we are “Christ's Body.”

So when we're broken – when our arrogance is broken, when our flesh is destroyed, when our earthen vessel of pride is stripped away – perhaps God's glory is most clearly revealed... like treasure in an earthen vessel.

Perhaps it's easiest to see the glory when there's not much earthen vessel – not much arrogance, and few fig leaves... when our efforts to clothe ourselves have failed.

Perhaps it's easiest to see and to experience

In someone like William at the bar on Santa Monica Boulevard;

Or in someone like that girl caught in the act of adultery and thrown at Jesus' feet, as we talked about last week;

Or in someone like that disfigured and lame man whom the Pharisees did not welcome at the banquet.

Perhaps God's glory is like a capacity for Love – receiving and giving Love... and God is Love. And this disfigured man was ready for a banquet of Love.

I think Jesus is saying to all Pharisees – “You say you want to eat bread in the Kingdom, but you just asked the bread to leave. When you ask the lame to leave, you ask me to leave. And soon, you will try to make me leave – you will crucify the Life of the Party.”

Well, I think Jesus actually – really and truly – enjoyed that disfigured man with dropsy, and I think Jesus actually – really and truly – enjoyed the woman caught in adultery. I think Jesus really enjoys William on Santa Monica Boulevard. I think Jesus really enjoyed tax collectors and sinners. (Hated sin but really enjoyed sinners... How did He do that?)

I think Jesus really wanted to enjoy the Pharisees, but they didn't want Jesus to enjoy them – the real them, naked them. They wanted Jesus to enjoy their hard work and “good deeds.” They wanted Jesus to applaud their fig leaves and vessels of clay, but not the Breath of God buried deep inside.

So the Pharisees had no appetite for what was being served.
I think I'm a Pharisee. I'm certainly a religious leader.
And so often, I miss the Banquet.

I've been wondering, “Why would I have missed the banquet that day? And why do I still miss it today?” Well, I think I would've wanted to avoid that suffering man, because I would have felt like I had to fix that suffering man... or at least tell him why he was suffering. I'd be afraid that I couldn't help him, and I'd disappoint him... and he'd reject me and blame me. And then I'd be hurt by him, and blame him... reject him before he could reject me... saying stuff like,

“If you weren't healed, obviously you didn't have enough faith,”

or

“If you're suffering, you haven't followed God's plan.”

Whatever the case, I wouldn't want to get too close to the man.
I couldn't bear the sheer weight of his sorrow.
I can't even bear my own sorrow.
I can't bear the world of sorrow, joy, and even glory that is another person.
It's overwhelming, and I lose control.

See? I can turn off the TV, put the dog outside, and control my possessions.
But a person ... I get sucked into their world, and let them judge me, define me, and crucify me.
People mean pain. Maybe that's why “people” drink alcohol at parties – to mediate all the relationships; to numb the pain that love requires.

Well, I wouldn't enjoy that man, because I'd feel like it was y job to judge him, save him, and redeem him. Pharisees think that's their job. And because I'm awfully insecure, I'd probably also let him try to judge me, save me, and redeem me.

Well, the Pharisee thinks it is his job to fix everybody and save his society. It seems like a lot of us think it's our job to fix everybody and save America. And maybe that's why the church in America is known more for party poopers than party planners.

Do you understand how liberating it is to actually believe that Jesus is the Judge, the Savior, and the Redeemer of the world? But then ... what are you? His witness. You testify to Him.

But every time you judge, don't you testify that He is not the Judge?

Every time you act like you're the Savior – all stressed out about saving – don't you testify that He is not the Savior?

And every time, in fear, that you are driven to redeem, don't you testify that He is not the Redeemer?

Well, the Pharisee didn't taste Grace, so he couldn't testify to Grace. He didn't taste Grace, so He wouldn't trust Grace, which meant he had to trust works... which made him a party pooper. This Pharisee couldn't see the Savior, so he wouldn't trust the Savior... which meant he had to be the savior, which made Him a party pooper.

But when I trust Grace for me, I begin to trust Grace for others.
I'm not the judge, savior, and redeemer of them.
They're not the judge, savior, and redeemer of me.
Jesus is.

Jesus mediates my relationship with God, and Jesus mediates my relationship with everyone else. So I can constantly forgive – that means “release.”
I can release them of their sin against me – trying to be God for me – and I can release me of my sin against them – trying to be God for them.

I acknowledge the dirt; I can even expect the dirt. But I can forgive the dirt, and enjoy the Breath of God inside. I can party.

Jesus was a walking party, because He knew the dirt was forgiven. He is the Lamb of God that takes it away.

Recently, at one of our board meetings, my friend shared something that was hugely encouraging to me. This is a paraphrase, I'm sure, but he said something like this:

“I think our church is called to proclaim this message of unlimited Grace – that God really loves everybody and Jesus really is the Savior of the World.

But this is why it means so much to me: for the first time in my adult life, I enjoy parties. I mean, I can just go to a party and enjoy everyone. I used to go thinking I had to judge them – who was saved, who wasn't saved, what was sin, and not sin; and that I had to save them – convince them of the plan of salvation; and redeem them – tell them how to make their life work.

I hated parties, and now I love parties. I go and just enjoy people. You know, love people.”

When you Love, you fulfill the whole Law, and when you love people, you testify to Grace. You bear witness that there is a God, that He loves them, and there’s a party going on – a party to which they are invited.

See, God gives you the privilege of announcing the Banquet. The Gospel is not a “business deal,” not a “limited time offer,” not an “argument.” It’s not even “a plan.” The Gospel is a proclamation: literally,

“Good news that is preached.”

“It is finished.”

“Dinner is served, and the Banquet stand ready.”

In the words of Isaiah, *“Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him that He might save us. This is the Lord (we have waited for Him). Let us be glad and rejoice in His Salvation.”*

Your life is to be that proclamation, and sometimes your word that very word:

The word Jesus spoke to the adulteress – “Neither do I condemn you”

The word Jesus spoke to the paralytic – “Your sins are forgiven you.”

The word Jesus spoke from the cross – “Father, forgive them... It is finished.”

It’s the Gospel ... Good News ... God Saves ... Jesus, the Banquet of Grace.

That Word is “Living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword.”

You do not judge, save, and redeem. However, that Word does judge, save, and redeem. Speak that Word. Better yet, be its incarnation – His Body. Even the Bread broken in the service of Love.

The movie *Chocolate* is about a small French town run by a very religious mayor, the Comte de Reynaud. He controls the church and the town by controlling the young priest. But he can’t control his bride. She’s left him, but he won’t admit it. He hides his shame, clinging to his honor and his town’s honor. He thinks he has to save himself and everybody else. He’s a Pharisee.

It’s Lent, and under his direction, everyone is fasting until Easter.

You know that one day of commanded fasting in the Old Testament? That was the “Day of Atonement.” We now call it “The Lord’s Supper,” or perhaps, “The Feast of Easter.”

Well, in this little French town, everyone is fasting until Easter, until a woman comes to town and sets up a chocolate shop... even planning a chocolate banquet for Easter Sunday. The Mayor is furious and won’t join the party. He tries to shut the chocolate shop down.

When he’s lost his battle – lost his marriage, lost control, and lost his honor the night before Easter – he goes to the church and falls before the crucifix asking, “What do you want me to do?”

[video clip #1- *chocolate*]

He cries himself to sleep in the chocolate shop window, and wakes on Easter morning a new man.

“It is God’s kindness that leads us to repentance.”

It is the Feast of Grace that judges us, saves us, and redeems us. So that we can join the party.

He wakes up on Easter morning, and joins the party.

[video clip #2 - *chocolate*]

On the night He was delivered up, Jesus took bread and broke it, saying, “This is my body broken for you.” And he took the cup, saying, “This is the New Covenant in my blood. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of Me.”

The Pharisees didn’t like what was being served. So that very night they came for Him, and cut Him up.

Scripture says, “His flesh” is “The Veil”:

The veil that covers the nations,
The veil that covers the Sanctuary, and
The veil that is ripped open to reveal the Grace of God.

They cut Him up and crucified Him on the mountain... and that’s the Banquet that judges us, saves us, redeems us, and releases us to party.

“I feel so lost... I don’t know what to do... tell me what to do.”

Taste the banquet, and join the party.

(Benediction)

He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you.

We’ll talk about that next week.
But we’re not just going to talk about it.
We’re going to do it.

We’re throwing a party, and we want you to invite everyone to come.

Is it an outreach? No, not really.

Is it a fund raiser? No, not really.
Is it the Fall Kickoff? No, not really.

Well then, what's its purpose?

It has no purpose.
It is the purpose.

The Kingdom of God is a party, and we just think its fun to live there.