

Luke 14:15-24

One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, 'Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!' Then Jesus said to him, 'Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, "Come; for everything is ready now." But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, "I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my apologies." Another said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my apologies." Another said, "I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come." So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, "Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame." And the slave said, "Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room." Then the master said to the slave, "Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner." '

"Bringing Grace to Thanksgiving"**Rev. Charles Schuster****November 22, 2009**

The two most important days of our lives - the day we were born, and the day we discovered why. James Thurber said it this way. "All of us should strive to learn before we die, what we're running from, and to, and why."

His name was Jack. He experienced the thing many of us have known, the routine which began when the little needle on the speedometer raced ahead of his awareness of it, and the flashing light and the brief burst of the siren, pull over to the side of the road, followed by "Let me see your driver's license, Sir." Bob was the name of the cop. "Officer, I wasn't going fast. Anyway, I've been running late and I gotta get home. Diane has fixed my favorite dinner. The kids are there, you know what I mean." Bob looked at him for a while and said, "Yeah, I know what you mean. And I know you have a reputation for speeding. This is a 45-mile zone and you were doing 70." Bob walked to the back of the police car and scribbled something on a pad. It was a ticket. Another ticket for Jack. There was a tap on the window, and Bob folded a piece of paper and handed it to Jack. Jack sat there thinking. Finally he opened the ticket. He thought it was a ticket. Instead it was a note. "Dear Jack," it read. "Once upon a time I had a daughter. She was 6 when she was killed. She was killed by a speeding driver. He got a fine and three months in jail, then he was free. Free to hug his daughters, all three of them. I had only one. I can never hug her again. A thousand times I thought I forgave that man. A thousand times I thought I had. Jack, I have a son. My son is all I have. Please be careful when you drive so fast. Please slow down. Signed, Bob." There was no ticket. This was much more powerful than a ticket. Jack looked around in time to see Bob's patrol car pull away. He did get home a little late, but he was a different person, and when he sat down for a meal, he paused, and he thought about his life. The loves of his live, the speed of his life.

Why are we in such a hurry? What is the purpose to the speed? This Thanksgiving we may get back in touch with who we are, and what we are to do with our time. It's a wonderful time, Thanksgiving, a wonderful day as we pause to think, and to hear a jubilant song. Best day of our life, when we discover why we were born. Two best days of our lives: The day we were born; the day we realize that we had something to give. It's the giving part of thanks. John Henry Jewett said it best: "God does not comfort us to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters." We've taken time to thank people who have meant much to us in the life of our church, unsung heroes. Sometimes it's awkward, how we express appreciation to important people in our lives, like the boss who wrote his secretary while he was on vacation with his family. He meant to write, "The scenery is beautiful. Wish you were here." Instead he wrote, "The scenery is here. Wish you were beautiful." Today I mention some of the beautiful people. They have found that they have something important to give, and they have given it cheerfully. We want to thank the women who sell those grocery cards every Sunday. We want to thank those people who are sitting at the tables to encourage us to expand our ministry, to honor somebody by doing it, and they're there every Sunday. We want to thank the cooks who prepare meals for our classes and our college students, the lunches, every Sunday. We want to thank the people who provide meals for families when there's been a funeral. We want to thank the people who put on the gala to raise over \$10,000 for the church. We want to thank the youth parents who prepare meals and the youth sponsors, and we want to thank people who have served on committees in the past, and for those who are signing up to serve on committees in the future.

Leonard Sweet tells about Wheeling Gaunt's gift, in Yellow Springs, Ohio, people received Christmas presents from Wheeling Gaunt, an ex-slave who died in 1894, just before his death, he deeded nine acres of land at the south edge of town, the proceeds of which to buy a perpetual Christmas gift for, as he said, poor widows. The town continues to do that to this day. Ten pounds of sugar, ten pounds of flour, arrive at the home of every widow in town just in time for holiday baking, thanks to a former slave, and the inscription on his gravestone reads, "Not what you get, but what you give." The best day of our life is the day we discover that we have something important that we can give. The ushers are forward here with us, and I just want to take time to thank you for all that you do, every Sunday, many of you, every Sunday. We just couldn't be the church if we didn't have the volunteers in the church and the people who make this church what it is. We have a gift for everyone as you leave this morning. We just want to say "Thank you." Let us pray.

O God, we come most fully alive when we realize the gifts we have and the ways we can share them. Accept this offering as our symbolic affirmation of what it means to be Christian in this world, and what it means to bring comfort to those in need. Amen.

The best day of our life. The day we were born, the day we discovered why. The day we learned we had something to give that was important. And the day we were not afraid to die. When we live to the glory of God. His name was Bill. 90 years old, a distinguished life, so much so they wanted to honor him at a luncheon. He hesitated. He was afraid they might expect him to speak, reluctant to do that. No, they just wanted to honor him. Well,

he went, they honored him, and he spoke. He stood in front of the podium. There was a tremor in his hand, Parkinson's had done a number on him over the years. This is what he said. "I'm reminded to day of Albert Einstein, the great physicist, who was honored as the Man of the Century by Time Magazine. Einstein was known to be brilliant, but absent-minded. He was once traveling from Princeton by train and the conductor came down the aisle punching tickets of every passenger, and when he came to Einstein, Einstein reached into his vest pocket. He couldn't find his ticket. He reached into his trouser pocket. He couldn't find it there. Reached into his briefcase, he couldn't find it there. He was looking around the seat beside him, he still couldn't find it. The conductor said, "Dr. Einstein, I know who you are. We all know who you are. I'm sure you bought a ticket. Don't worry about it." Einstein nodded appreciatively. The conductor continued down the aisle. As he was ready to move to the next car, he turned around and saw the great physicist down on his hands and knees, looking under the seat for his ticket. The conductor rushed back and said, "Dr. Einstein, Dr. Einstein, don't worry. I know who you are. No problem, you don't need a ticket. I'm sure you bought one." Einstein looked at him and said, "Young man, I too know who I am. What I don't know is where I'm going."

Bill continued. He said, "See the suit I'm wearing? It's a brand new suit. My children and grandchildren have been telling me I've gotten a little slovenly in my old age. I used to be a bit more fastidious, so I went out and bought a new suit for this luncheon and for one more occasion. You know what that occasion is. This is the suit I'll be in when I'm buried. And when you hear I'm dead," Bill said, Billy Graham said, "remember the suit I'm wearing and remember this. I not only know who I am, I also know where I'm going."

Billy Graham's not afraid to die. He is fully alive, and death brings him no fear. His life is lived to the glory of God, and he achieved that in his revivals, and all the influences that he had, and perhaps the greatest legacy is those shoeboxes, which provide Christmas for children all over the world, and to the glory of God, giving them a sense that there is a God of love, to the glory of God. There are so many ways to say it. We have a member of our choir who is world-renowned, I'll ask him to stand, he won't want to do this, but his name is (audio ends here)