

**Sermon Notes for 5/8/16 (Easter 7, Sunday after Ascension)**

**Preached at Jehovah Lutheran – St. Paul, MN**

**Text: Revelation 22:17**

**Theme: AN INVITATION TOO GOOD TO REFUSE**

**The Point:** Christ's invitation offers us forgiveness, hope and joy that extend into all eternity. How could we refuse such an offer?

**Introduction:** Since the movie *The Godfather* came out (hard to believe that was in 1972, the year I graduated from college), one of Marlo Brando's lines that lives on (in infamy, we might say) is this one: "I'm gonna make him an offer he can't refuse." And you remember one of the next scenes, in which the movie producer wakes up one morning with the head of his favorite racing horse with him in bed (a most tragic picture, even if this were not Kentucky Derby weekend!). Some offers can't be refused because they awaken fear and trembling, as with Brando's Godfather figure.

But then there are other offers, other invitations that are too good to refuse. That is the case with today's text. Here are the key words: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let everyone who hears say, 'Come.' And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift." That is truly AN INVITATION TOO GOOD TO REFUSE. The one who is thirsty is invited and is welcome to come to the well of living water, Jesus Christ Himself. When you are thirsty, the invitation to drink comes as a welcome one.

But sometimes people mistake the invitation for a demand or a command. A couple found political asylum in this country during the Second World War. They came from Eastern or Central Europe, and they were not well versed in American culture. One day they received an invitation to a wedding, and at the bottom of the invitation were those cryptic letters: RSVP. In his thick, Eastern European accent, the husband said, "Vife, vat does it mean: RSVP?" So they thought for a while, until inspiration dawned, and the husband said, "Vife, I know vat it means: Remember Send Vedding Presents." They imagined that the invitation was a demand. That could be a tragedy in a different direction.

That happens with some people regarding God's invitation to come to Jesus Christ. Instead of viewing it as a glorious and blessed invitation, they see it as a demand on them, and so they get their hackles up and refuse to respond. Some preachers and teachers of the Word have fallen into this as well. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," Scripture says. So they rail on people with words like these: "You see, YOU have to believe. YOU have to take Jesus as your Lord. You have to. . ." and on and on in similar words and phrases. No doubt you have heard such things – hopefully not from this pulpit.

That sort of message turns the invitation into a command. That's entirely against the spirit of Jesus. Now I do believe there were a couple of instances where Jesus spoke the word, "Come" as a command. One was when He spoke to Peter who had invited Jesus to tell him to walk on the water with Him (although you could probably make the case that this is an invitation as well). The other is when He speaks to the dead Lazarus, "Come out." Lazarus could do nothing but respond, as Jesus' command itself created the hearing ears to hear and the strength of limb to obey it. But most of the time the word "Come" in the mouth of Jesus is a pure and simple invitation to enjoy His fellowship, His forgiveness, His new life.

The misunderstanding of Christ's invitation is not a new thing. Jesus addressed the religious leaders of His day, "You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life." They were too proud to respond to Jesus' invitation. They were too self-absorbed to get the point that their own Scriptures testified to the coming of the Messiah, and that this Jesus had fulfilled those prophecies to the letter. They refused to come to Him.

And that same thing is happening today, within the Jewish community certainly, but also among many who call themselves Christian, but who resist the invitation to come to Jesus for forgiveness and life.

Of course, some invitations are almost too good to believe. I suspect that Ahmed Mohamed had that experience. Remember Ahmed? He is the teenager from Irving, Texas, who was arrested on charges of making a fake bomb because he had built a digital clock from a pencil case and brought it to school. During the same day he was arrested, Ahmed received an invitation from President Obama to bring his clock and to visit the president at the White House. From being a high schooler under arrest to being a guest of the President at the White House – that was quite a change. Ahmed might have wondered whether this invitation was too good to believe or to accept.

The invitation our Lord issues is more amazing than an invitation to the White House. Jesus invites us to spend the day, our lives in time, and all of eternity as well within His embrace. “Come to Me,” He invites – this is no command, even if the English language has to put the verb into the imperative mood. But this imperative expresses a different “mood” from the command. This word is invitation, pure and simple.

A church which did not follow our practice of the call had two pastors on its final list of candidates from which they would invite one to be their pastor. The two pastors were both invited to preach a sermon on the topic of hell. After both sermons had been presented, the congregation was asked to vote, and there was a unanimous vote to hire the second candidate. When that pastor asked the leaders what could possibly have made such a difference as to have a unanimous decision, one of the leaders replied, “When the other pastor preached, it seemed that he believed hell to be a good place for those who deserved it, so they would get what was coming to them. When you preached, we knew that you were grieved at the heart that anyone would have to face such a judgment.” That second pastor knew the mood of Christ’s invitation. The heart of Christ breaks over the thought that any of His human creatures should desire to spend eternity away from Him instead of in His presence. And so His invitation continues to be proclaimed, from the heart of the Church in every land and among every people group, whether or not that invitation is received with joyful hearts or with hard and stony hearts.

Some invitations are refused because we do not know where the invitation originates. Not knowing the source of the invitation might make you less inclined to accept it. Many of the invitations I have received have not been for my good, but they have been manipulative. I get “invitations” by mail or email regularly to go to a “free” meal where the group or individual wants to sell me something, a service or product that they put on the market. That is hardly an exciting invitation. And while I could get a meal or two that way, it is hardly a robust and meaningful invitation.

Some people look at Jesus’ offer this way, as if Jesus were interested only in making more members for the church so that more envelopes can be distributed so that the church can afford to pay its bills. But Jesus’ invitation is not self-serving in the least. His invitation is made possible only because of His suffering and death on our behalf. And His invitation is made so that you and every other person who receives it may benefit from His eternal desire to bless and welcome you.

Some invitations are bogus, and we need to recognize this up front. In recent years, there have been scammers on line who have been issuing invitations, some of them made up to look just like serious invitations from LinkedIn or other similar sites. There just a click on one of the links could expose you to some serious hacking of your banking or other personal activities. Christ’s invitation never brings us harmful effects. It offers and effects hope and freedom and life that endures.

In the last chapter of Revelation (from which our text is taken), John paints a marvelous picture of the heavenly Jerusalem, from the river of the water of life, clear as crystal, clearer than any mountain stream

flowing out of the Rockies to the tree of life that produces a crop every month (how would you like to own that orchard?) to the presence of the Alpha and the Omega Himself, who is the light of the city. And he concludes with the priceless portrait of the invitation to the wedding feast.

“The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’” This is not an order. It is not a demand placed upon you. It is a gracious offer, a most blessed invitation. Through the ministry of the Gospel, the Spirit issues the invitation through the voice of the church, the bride of Christ, as she echoes the voice of the Bridegroom, inviting people to “Come.” To those who are burdened with the trials of life and the demands of their vocation, Jesus says, “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” To those who are wondering whether their lives will ever amount to anything important, Jesus says, “Come, follow Me” as He leads them into service to those who are in need.

To people who think they are more important than others and who shoo away the unimportant, Jesus says, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them.” To those who have been shunned by family or friends or co-workers or neighbors for their differences, Jesus invites and promises, “Anyone who comes to Me I will never drive away.” To those for whom life has become dry and dusty as a desert, Jesus offers, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to Me and drink of living water.”

Here echoes an invitation that we ought never to decline or turn away. The Spirit issues this invitation. Where have you heard that invitation? You have heard it from the lips of pastors and teachers who have held before your eyes the Crucified One, who is also the Risen and Reigning One. You have heard it from pulpits and classrooms where the Word of God is primary. You have heard it from godly mothers and fathers, who may not have had the world to give you in terms of material things, but who knew the most important possession is faith in the Savior, through whom you do possess all things. You have heard it from friends who were not ashamed to point you to the Savior, whose invitation trumps all other offers.

John’s vision reminds us, “Let everyone who hears say, ‘Come.’” Once we have heard the gracious news of forgiveness from the lips of our Savior who hangs His head and dies at Calvary, once we have been introduced to Him who has conquered death and the grave in His resurrection, once we have been astounded by the fact that this ever-ascended Lord of the universe wants to spend eternity with us – well, then we also want to pass on the invitation to others: “Come.” “Come and hear the Gospel message that promises new life. Come celebrate God’s gifts in the midst of God’s people. Come and delight in the fellowship of sinners who are saints by Christ’s washing of their robes in His blood. Come and find life where you thought there was only death and darkness.”

That is the entire reason that this congregation has existed through the years, to keep the invitation alive and going out: “Come.” It matters not how you have lived your life to this date. Come and know the Savior’s love. There is no barrier of “us and them”, only the unity of those who know that Jesus is Lord and that to serve Him is to know life that endures. “Come.” No one will ask you what your sins have been. God knows them all, and despite all of it, Jesus has died for you, to cleanse you and to give you a new start. “Come.” Thirsty for meaning? “Come.” Hungry for purpose? “Come.” Looking for life? Come and know that Jesus holds all of it in His hands and desires to hand it over to you. Just COME!

**Conclusion:** Christ’s invitation offers us forgiveness, hope and joy that extend into all eternity. How could we refuse such an offer? And how could we refuse to issue that invitation to others in His name? “The Spirit AND the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let everyone who hears say, ‘Come.’” Let’s see to it that this invitation is never silenced until the reason for the invitation is fully in place and the wedding feast in eternity has begun. In the strong name of Jesus, Savior and Bridegroom of the Church. AMEN!