

“Come to the Table: Rejoice, Remember, and Receive”**(Philippians 4: 1-9; Matthew 22: 1-14) October 11, 2026****Premkumar Immanuel Clement**

Growing up in India, I often wondered about the rules surrounding food and dining. In India, eating is not always simply a matter of preparing a meal, sitting down, and enjoying food together. It can be governed by many rules: with whom you should eat, what you may eat on particular days, what foods are appropriate for festivals and family gatherings, and what is permitted on auspicious or inauspicious occasions.

In some places, these customs are closely connected with caste. You may even find restaurants that proudly advertise themselves as vegetarian establishments. Vegetarian food itself is a legitimate dietary choice, of course. But in certain social contexts, such labels can also carry a caste association, sending an indirect message about the kind of people who are considered to belong there—and who might not be welcome.

In such settings, the question is not always whether you can afford the meal or whether you are properly dressed. Even if you have money to pay, the invitation may not be open to everyone. I remember another practice in some villages. When a family sat down to eat, the elders might instruct someone to lock the front door so that no unexpected visitor could enter and join the meal.

As I grew up, I wondered: Why should eating together require so many boundaries? Is it because food is scarce? Is it because food is considered sacred? Is it because of exclusion, or because people believe these rules have divine authority? I could not fully understand it.

But I learned that a meal can do more than satisfy hunger. A table can reveal who belongs, whom we welcome, and whom we keep outside.

That is why today's Gospel reading is so striking. Jesus tells us about a king who prepares a wedding banquet and opens the invitation in a way that overturns our ordinary expectations.

Let us consider three invitations this parable offers us.

1. Rejoice: God's Invitation Is Wider Than Our Boundaries

In Matthew 22, a king prepares a wedding banquet for his son. He sends his servants to invite the guests, but they refuse to come. The king sends more servants, announcing that everything is ready. Yet some ignore the invitation, while others mistreat the messengers.

Finally, the king tells his servants to go into the streets and invite everyone they find. The servants gather people, “both good and bad,” and the wedding hall is filled. What a remarkable contrast!

In the dining practices I have described, a door might be locked to keep an outsider from joining the meal. In Jesus' parable, the king sends servants out to bring people in. When some refuse the invitation, the king does not abandon the banquet. He widens the invitation.

The invitation reaches beyond the expected guests, beyond social respectability, beyond the boundaries people use to separate themselves from others. This is the surprising generosity of God. God's kingdom is not a private dining room reserved for people who meet our social, cultural, or religious qualifications. God invites people who might never expect to be welcomed. Notice that the king keeps sending messengers. God's invitation is persistent. God does not give up easily on humanity.

Sometimes we imagine that we must first become good enough, successful enough, or religious enough before we can approach God. But the parable reminds us that the invitation comes from the generosity of the king, not the achievements of the guests. So let us rejoice!

2. Remember: We Are Guests of Grace, Not Owners of the Table

But the parable takes a difficult turn. The king enters the banquet hall and notices a guest who is not wearing a wedding garment. When questioned, the man is speechless, and the king orders him removed.

This is a troubling part of the story. If everyone has been invited, why does the king reject this guest? Jesus is reminding his hearers that God's invitation is not something to take lightly. Being invited into God's kingdom calls for a response.

The wedding garment can be understood as an image of a life shaped by God's grace—a life that puts on the character of Christ, expressed in humility, mercy, and love. The man represents the danger of wanting a place at the banquet without allowing the invitation to make any difference in his life. God's invitation to His kingdom requires those invited to live a righteous life.

We must not misunderstand this as saying that we earn salvation through good behavior.

God's grace is freely given. Our faithful response should demonstrate that we have received salvation as a gift amidst our transgression, and manifest a transformed life. God's invitation into his kingdom demands a righteous life from those who are invited.

Many times we think that we are the hosts of the banquet and claim the ownership of the table. And if we remember that we ourselves depend on grace, we cannot look down on those whom God welcomes. Remember: We do not earn our place at God's table, and we have no right to close the door on those whom God invites.

3. Receive: Let Grace Become Our Way of Life

What, then, does it mean to receive God's invitation faithfully? Here we turn to Paul's words in Philippians 4. Paul encourages the church to rejoice in the Lord always, to let its gentleness

be known to everyone, to bring anxieties to God in prayer, and to focus on what is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, and worthy of praise.

Paul moves us from the grace we receive to the life we are called to live. If God welcomes us, we must learn to welcome others. If God shows us mercy, we must become people of mercy. If God makes room for us, we must examine the boundaries we create around our own tables.

This is a question for our families, our communities, and our churches. Who finds a place among us? Who feels that the door is open? Who might be standing outside, uncertain whether they will be accepted? Do we keep the doors open?

Dear friends, let us return to the picture of the table. I began by recalling dining practices in India where social boundaries could determine who was welcome to share a meal. Jesus gives us a different vision: a king whose invitation reaches the streets and gathers people who would not ordinarily be expected to sit together.

The contrast challenges us to consider the kind of community we are becoming.

Will we build walls around the table, or will we reflect the generosity of God's invitation?

So let us respond to God's invitation in three ways.

Rejoice because God's grace reaches farther than our boundaries.

Remember that we are guests who live by mercy, not people who have earned the right to exclude others.

Receive God's grace with grateful hearts, allowing it to shape our words, our relationships, and our life together. Amen.