

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,
of rich food filled with marrow,
of well-aged wines strained clear.
And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations;
he will swallow up death forever.
Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people he will take away
from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.
It will be said on that day,
Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him,
so that he might save us.
This is the LORD for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

As we have already realized, this is our Second Sunday of Advent. I hope you were able to see what I wrote in our Newsletter that went out this week. I am hoping to build on that for us today. Last Sunday we heard the profound poetic words of Isaiah whose name in Hebrew (Yesha-Yahu) literally means “Deliverer, the LORD is He.” That is simply a great name. Today we find even more wonder in the poems of this ancient man of God. Today is also special because it is a Sunday for Advent Communion, which is even more special since we only have Communion once during Advent each year.

It will be even more special today because it is being approached from a different angle, a non-traditional angle, but a deep historical angle. We have just read the passage from Isaiah 25 that is probably the original inspiration for having Communion at all. There is a promise from God Almighty, a

promise that looks really good. We live in a hungry world. While we are far away from it in our little village, most of the world does not have easy access to abundant food. I was reading the other day that we Americans eat 3 times more meat than any other nation, and that one half of the plant protein that we grow goes to feed livestock. So food is no mystery for most of us. But our world has always been a hungry world. Maybe Isaiah's words mean much more to others than they do to us.

I love this picture that Kristina found for us. We see supernatural hands reaching down from the sky, and we see a great table that is set. Things are ready. But we are not just told about abundant food. We are told that something more than hunger will be eliminated. Our human tears, our sadness, and even death itself will be taken away. I do not know how anyone could hope for more. I suspect that all of us would agree that if we could actually request anything for Christmas, I don't see how we could choose anything other than what Isaiah 25 promises us that God will do. Let's hold on to that for a moment. We have another picture to consider this morning. It is time for some special history.

If we could go back in time to the earliest Christian communities, and we could take Communion with them, we would probably find one of two very different experiences compared to what we know today, and what we have known for 1500 years. If we could travel back to the year 120, in order to have Communion with some people, we would possibly meet in someone's home. There were no church buildings like we have.

So we have to imagine no church buildings anywhere. We would likely have a meal together of regular food. Somewhere in that meal, we have have the bread and the cup of wine. And just like St. Paul says, we would “*...proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.*” We would be reminded not just of his death, but of his return, and all that would be accomplished at his return. But there was another option as well, one that John Wolfe and I talked about one time... Where did earliest Christians often have Communion? In cemeteries. In fact, why, and where in cemeteries? This is a thing that they never usually tell you in church, but we learned it in seminary. Where in the cemetery is Communion served? Over the grave of a Martyr of the Church. Remember hearing about the Romans killing Christians? They did. Not often, and usually not big groups of people. They would go after the leaders first, thinking if they could get them to give up hope publicly, then that would do the trick. Get the leaders to renounce their belief in God, and that would do. But so many would not renounce their faith, and they were killed. It was at their graves that people would gather to eat the bread and drink the wine. And when they would do this, they would say the following: When you eat the bread, you would say this is a foretaste of the bread at God’s great feast. When you would drink the cup, it would be to say that the blood of Jesus, and the blood of the martyrs was not shed in vain. When they ate at the Martyrs’ graves, they looked to the future, to a feast in God’s Kingdom, where there would be no more tears, and no more death.

Just so you know, when they did start building actual churches in the Roman Empire, which were nice and government funded, the altars in the front all had something very peculiar in common: they were actually stone burial vaults that held the Martyrs who had been killed. Of all the things I learned traveling to European art museums as a student in 1979, the most surprising was the number of ornate white marble sarcophagus vaults that I saw in museums that were used as altars in European churches! To this day, even in the United States, many altars for Roman Catholics are in fact sarcophagus vaults.

In a few minutes I will be saying the great Eucharistic Prayer for Advent. We have 13 different versions of the prayer for different times of the year. Every single one of them ends the same way: **By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet.** Do we hear those words? I am going to ask you to think about these words either before, or during, or after you have Communion. Maybe we should think about them all day today. In Communion we are reminded that we need to be in ministry as One Body, until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his banquet! Until we feast at his banquet. Do we want to be a part of that Party? Will we consider joining Jesus in God's great banquet on the mountain. Let's prepare ourselves and the Elements that we have for Holy Communion, Advent Holy Communion.