

Luke 14:

When Jesus entered the scene in Jerusalem, there was a culture war going on. On the one hand, you had the Roman Empire occupying the land God gave to his people, Israel. On the other hand, the priesthood was controlled by the Sadducees who didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead and rejected all the books of the Bible except for the first five written by Moses. Herod, a puppet of the Roman Empire, and not a descendant of David, was sitting on the throne ruling Judea. The Pharisees were outwardly the good guys. They taught the final resurrection. They held to all the books of the Old Testament as the written Word of God. They were conservatives. They would have rejected our current culture of death, which insists that a woman has the right to kill her unborn child. They would have been appalled by the sexual perversions promoted by the heathen both in their day as well as in our own.

Those who promote the murder of the unborn, rank adultery and fornication, and sexual abominations, which shouldn't even be named among the saints, will most certainly lose. They might boast in their ability to break barriers. They might have their heydays for a while. But the natural law of God will always catch up to their so-called progress. Their swift-tongued wizards will have to withdraw and admit the basic facts of life – a boy is a boy; a girl is a girl; if it's not a baby then you're not pregnant; children are most cared for with a mom and a dad who are married to each other. But acknowledging these obvious facts of life doesn't compare to what Jesus came into this world to do.

Jesus is Wisdom in the flesh. Proverbs 9 says that Wisdom has built her house. She has slaughtered her meat. She calls out, inviting the simple to learn wisdom from her. This Wisdom, portrayed in the Proverbs as a wise woman, is the Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds. He is God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God. And just as God created the heavens and the earth, so Wisdom has built her house. Christ has prepared a place in his Father's house. By his own slaughter, by his own sacrifice for the sins of all people, he invites all sinners to come and feast on him. His own Father, whose glory he shares as the only true God, sends out this invitation through the gospel.

Jesus came to eat at the house of one of the Pharisees on the Sabbath Day. When he was there, he healed a man of a terrible sickness. He worked. Because he is Lord of the Sabbath. He is the one who gives us rest from our labors by his own labor. He brings peace by his own suffering and death. He whose kingdom is higher than the Romans, whose priesthood is greater than the Sadducees, whose crown is purer than Herod's – he who will judge all the living and the dead and put an end to all murders and perversions of every dying culture – he comes in meekness and humility. He comes to strengthen to the weary souls, feeding those who are spiritually starving, giving them food that endures to eternal life.

By doing this, he gives a much better culture than we could ever achieve by our own efforts, our own protests, or our own voting. He brings a living culture of life, which covers up sins, comforts those who mourn, declares us righteous, and gives peace to our burdened consciences forever. His death is the death of all things earthly, and it is the life of all those who live before God under his mercy and kindness.

Almost fifty years ago, in a case known as Roe vs. Wade, the Supreme Court of the United States made a sweeping decision, which forced every state in the union to allow a woman to kill their unborn children. Millions of American children have been murdered in the womb ever since. But this past Friday, when the church was commemorating the birth of John the Baptist, the Supreme

Court reversed this evil decision of Roe vs. Wade. Our own state immediately banned this horrendous practice. By the providence of Almighty God, by his most loving kindness and care for the fatherless children, it appears that the pendulum in our current culture wars has swung, at least for now.

We should thank God for this. We should pray for all unborn children. We should pray that all women who are overwhelmed with the guilt of killing their children would find peace in the forgiving blood of Jesus Christ. We should pray that all law-makers, all abortion doctors, and all activists who have supported this unspeakable act of savagery would be granted repentance unto life. We should pray that God would protect the little ones from the Herods of our culture who would deny them the right to come into this world unharmed. We should pray fervently that the justices who voted against overturning Roe vs. Wade would repent. And we should pray that God would preserve the lives of those who faithfully voted to overturn it.

But we should also repent of the idolatry in our own hearts. The attitude, which caused our wider culture to embrace the murder of the unborn and all sorts of sexual perversions going along with it, also dwells within every sinful heart. It leads even Christians to view sex as nothing but mutual pleasure, divorced from God's act of creating life. The attitude, which leads some to kill or mutilate little children, is the same attitude that leads others to value money, careers, and leisure over the gift of children. How often do we speak of children as our decisions? We decided to start having children. We didn't plan this one. This is no way for Christians to talk! The Bible says that children are a heritage from the Lord. He gives and takes away. He kills and makes alive. He who created life is the same one who invites all to feast on his dear Son so that you, your children, and all who are far off may have rest in your souls.

We don't know what will happen in the next several years. The kings of the earth are always raging against the Lord and against his Christ. We should be on our guard so that we do not go along with their despicable acts of cruelty and perversion. But we should also not miss the point of our Lord's parable for this morning.

Jesus tells a parable illustrating the great marriage feast between the Lamb and his bride, the Church. The Father has given up his Son to the slaughter of the cross to save sinners from condemnation. He has raised him from the dead to give life to all who are in the bondage of death. The dinner is ready. It's all prepared. As Jesus cried out from the cross, "It is finished." Now is the day of salvation. God sends out his servants, bound to do one thing – proclaim his pure Word. Through this Word he invites all people to dine with him, to hear his gospel and confess the saving death of his Son with all the saints.

But as Jesus' parable demonstrates, they all alike began to excuse themselves. One bought some land, and he had to go and look at it. Another bought some animals, and he needed to test them out. Another just got married. None of these people said, "No, I'm going to go get drunk with my pagan friends instead." None of them said, "I'm in favor of abortion rights, so I'm not interested." None of them said, "I don't like what your church teaches about sex and marriage." No, they were seemingly standup people. They had their stuff together, so to speak. Who would condemn someone for buying land, taking care of his livestock, or taking a wife? These are all good things. But how did the master of the feast react to these excuses? He didn't say, "Well, as long as they're not getting into trouble," or "At least they aren't deviants in the culture promoting all sorts of debauchery." No, he was angry. He was angry, because despite their well-to-do lives, despite being on the right side of the culture war, their hearts were hardened against the Word of God.

Jesus says that salt is good. It's good to oppose evil things in the culture. But if the salt loses its saltiness, then it's of no use. What's the point in opposing the godless, left-wing ideologues of our

age, if you're neglecting your own soul? This only makes people blind hypocrites. They imagine that because they hold a good job, vote the right way, and know how to meet their goals, then they are just fine the way they are. They don't talk about God's Word with their children whom they imagine they planned out in a responsible way. They are fools, forgetting what the Psalmist sings, "Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain." No matter how much they boast in their own righteousness, they count themselves unworthy of the feast of eternal life. So they receive this great judgment from God: "I tell you none of those men who were invited will taste my dinner."

But what kind of people come to the feast? What kind of people drink deeply from the fountains of the gospel? What kind of people are nurtured by the comfort of the forgiveness of their sins? The master sent his servants out to invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame. These are often those who have made themselves poor by wasteful habits. Often they have fallen into horrible sins such as adultery or murder, even of their own children, and their hearts and minds can find no rest outside of the food their Savior provides. Many have been caught up in crippling addictions, blinded by their own foolishness. But they are made wise by the knowledge of their Savior. And the master sends for even more. They are from the streets and hedges, those who had been caught up in false doctrine and all kinds of paganism. Now they finally know the truth, and their great thirst for God's Word is satisfied again and again. They long to sit in the congregation of the saints, to learn more about their Savior through the liturgy, hymns, and Scripture lessons, and to eat the body and blood of him who died to give them eternal life. It is a great privilege to sit with these people, to dine with the humble and poor in spirit, to comfort them and be comforted by them with the same gospel.

The culture of death will only lead to death. We thank God for anything he does to protect the innocent from such wickedness. But this same Lord gives us a culture, which is much greater than any earthly laws and rulings can bring about. He cultivates life in our hearts through his Word. He keeps our children in this faith as he gives us strength and patience to bear trials and temptations in this life. Let us pray:

Oh, may we all hear when our Shepherd doth call,
In accents persuasive and tender,
That, while there is time, we make haste, one and all,
And find Him, our mighty defender!
Have mercy upon us, O Jesus! Amen.