

Dear Friends in Christ,

Tom Brady is the Hall of Fame quarterback for the New England, Patriots. These are the Super Bowl champion Patriots. Mr. Brady made some news in the off season. The champions had an invitation to the White House to visit with the president. Mr. Brady made news by choosing to not attend. There was speculation as to why he didn't go. I won't get into it. If you had an invitation to the White House for an event in the last 20-30 years, would you have turned it down? Curiosity alone might move us to accept such an invitation.

I have a more important question, "Would you decline an invitation from the most important person in the world? This also comes from his Father. God is sending invitation out across the land. He wants people to attend his heavenly feast. The celebration for his Son. Our immediate thought would be, "No I would not decline it." Let's pause for a minute. We may not be as excited about the banquet as we think. Listening to the account in 2 Chronicles will remind us that not everyone is eager to attend the banquet. The Lord wants us to understand and be ready for his banquet in this life and the next. Today we are encouraged to **Hang on to the King's Invitation.**

1. The King invites people to the festival celebration.

In 2 Chronicles 30 we hear of an invitation to a different kind of celebration. King Hezekiah who lived about 700 years before Jesus was born, invited God's people to come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover festival.

A. The author of 2 Chronicles, sometimes called "the Chronicler", simply tells us that King Hezekiah sent out letters of invitation to God's people. The King wants them to know that God wants them to come and join in the celebration.

1. This celebration was special. The people of God had not celebrated the Passover festival publicly in a long time. Why hadn't they celebrated? The people hadn't been thinking of the Lord God. They had been pursuing their own selfish interests. They had turned from the faith and worshiped idols. Things had gone badly. Now the Lord through Hezekiah was inviting them to come back and enjoy God's forgiveness and blessings.

This work of Hezekiah inspires us to think of Christians use to go to church, but don't anymore. How can we inspire them and encourage them to come to the celebration of word and Sacrament at church? We need to try.

2. The King has big plans in mind. He doesn't want only God's people in Jerusalem to attend the celebration. He wants God's people in the North also to attend. However, the people of the North had not worshipped in Jerusalem in over a century. Most of the people had been killed or taken into captivity. However, there were still people in Ephraim, Manasseh, Zebulun, etc.

The King had in mind that God's salvation is for all. We connect with the God of salvation on earth through worship services. The King has in mind what Jesus was thinking when he said, **"Go and make disciples of all nations."** We want to witness about the great celebration that is going to take place in heaven some day. We invite people that celebration when we tell them about Jesus and invite them to worship celebrations here on earth.

B. Listen to the response to the King's invitation.

1. Some people did not accept the invitation. They rejected it. They made fun of it with scorn and ridicule. The Good News of the King's invitation is nonsense to many. This is still true today.

2. However, some were moved to accept the invitation. This is nothing less than the Holy Spirit creating faith in the good news and moving people to come to the King's celebration. Some will come.

3. An important detail is that the Lord God deliberately gave a unity of mind to his people in Jerusalem. Believers need to be united to work together. The Lord God creates unity through his word. Believers see God's will and they work together to accomplish it. The Lord still works this unity or "walking together" as Lutheran churches sometimes call it.

2. The King intercedes for the people.

A lot of good was being accomplished by the King. But, we run into a "sour note". Some of the people failed to follow the rules of the Passover celebration. They sinned. The Chronicler reports good news. King Hezekiah intercedes with God for the people. There is peace.

A. It is says in verses 17 & 18a, **"Since many in the crowd had not consecrated themselves, the Levites had to kill the Passover lambs for all those who were not ceremonially clean and could not consecrate their lambs to the Lord. Although most of the many people who came from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun had not purified themselves, yet they ate the Passover, contrary to what was written."**

1. The modern ear hears this and we say, "So they were in trouble because they did not wash their hands?" No. The Law of Moses had a list of things that a person could do make themselves unclean. If you were guilty of sexual immorality, murder or some similar sin, you were unclean. Also, coming into contact with a dead person or animal, made you unclean. Certain

diseases like leprosy made you unclean. Eating the wrong kinds of foods would make you unclean.

If you were unclean, you had to present a sacrifice in the temple at Jerusalem and do as the priest commanded in order to be clean again. Without being clean, you could not celebrate the festival in a God pleasing way or enjoy the benefits of salvation.

2. Please understand that these people were sinning in ignorance. Most had not celebrated the festival in their life time. Some of them had been idol worshippers. They did not realize they were doing wrong. Because the Holy Spirit speaks of it here, it is a serious issue. You can be sure that their sin was pointed out to them. Even though it was done in ignorance, they needed forgiveness. We are reminded by the Holy Spirit that every sin is a serious matter before God and without forgiveness there is no salvation.

B. Hezekiah realizes something must be done. He prays for grace for the people.

1. **18b But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, “May the Lord, who is good, pardon everyone 19 who sets their heart on seeking God—the Lord, the God of their ancestors—even if they are not clean according to the rules of the sanctuary.”** The King speaks a beautiful prayer. He asks God to pardon or forgive the people. They are wrong, but they are looking to the Lord for salvation.

2. We are told in verse 20, **“And the Lord heard Hezekiah and healed the people.”** It means that the Lord healed the breach or the distance between him and the people. He forgave them their sins. God did not forget those sins they had to be paid for. But they would be paid by someone else.

C. In Psalm 130 it says, **“But with [the Lord] there is forgiveness.”** The Lord God himself would provide forgiveness. He would do it in the person of the promised Savior.

1. When the Chronicler mentions “healed” perhaps he is thinking of the words of Isaiah, a contemporary of Hezekiah. In Isaiah 53 it says, **“The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”** (53:5) 700 years later Jesus would be the Passover lamb of God. He would close the gap between God and sinners when he carried a wooden cross to Calvary. There his blood would be shed for the people’s sin. Sins, including yours and mine, would be paid in full. **“By Jesus wounds you are healed.”**

2. This is what is so important about the people attending the Passover celebration. The sacrificing of the lamb was a foreshadowing of Jesus the Lamb of God being sacrificed for us. In this celebration was the promise of forgiveness and life.

We have our own celebration that we attend. It is our Christian worship service each weekend. With that worship service we often have the celebration of Holy Communion. It is so important that we pay attention to the Lord's invitation to come and to partake of his Supper. It is filled with forgiveness and hope. It is a promise that we are ready to attend the great wedding supper in heaven. Our not attending here or our going through the motions may mean that we are not that interested in attending heavenly wedding banquet. How can we say "no" when God only has our highest good in mind? Treasure this invitation.

3. The King and the people celebrate with great joy.

The Chronicler reports that King Hezekiah and the people celebrated the festival with great joy.

A. They celebrated despite some difficulties and mistakes.

1. We are told some people came down for the festival, but not all. Some of God's people continued in their idolatry and worldliness. Not all the priests and Levites were excited about the festival at first. Some worshippers who showed up were not properly prepared. Yet we are told the festival went forward for seven days with great rejoicing. In the end even the priests and Levites rejoiced.

2. This reminds us that there will always be imperfections and difficulties in God's church. Our salvation and the joy that comes from it is so great that it out weighs all the difficulties. So there is a mistake in the slides or an usher passes the plate down the wrong pew. In Bible class you may give the wrong answer. That should not suppress the joy that we have in Jesus.

B. In a sad world we need to be reminded of this joy regularly. King Hezekiah takes steps to see this happen.

1. The Chronicler reports that he encouraged leaders. He wanted them to begin planning for the next celebration. Part of that work was taking the people back to the days of Moses and teaching them what Passover was about. Some had forgotten and others had not taught their children. There would be program of getting the word out.

2. At the end of verse 22 we have indications that the priests and Levites took their roles seriously. In fact when Messiah Jesus arrives 700 years later, Passover is still being celebrated. When we set our hearts on getting people to God's celebrations and we pray, the Lord is set on helping us. It will be according to his will, but he will help.

Conclusion: Sometimes we may roll our eyes at C & E Christians. These are people who show up for church on rare occasions. Maybe we should be happy that there is interest in our Savior's invitation. Maybe we should say,

"I am glad you are here. I hope that you will come again soon. It is so important that you attend the Lord's banquet, even now!"

All these celebrations are important because they are a foretaste of the heavenly wedding banquet. We should not discourage, but encourage people to attend celebrations here and now. Worship and the Lord's Supper is the Lord's way of growing faith and bringing joy. At each feast we meet Jesus. We remember our Savior King's loving sacrifice. Each time we celebrate we should grow in our anticipation of the heavenly wedding banquet in eternity. Amen.