

ISAIAH 25:6-9

THE HEAVENLY FEAST

For Thanksgiving I'd like to treat you to a Thanksgiving feast. We begin with a Danish movie: *Babette's Feast*. I saw the English version, but still in describing it there are words that are hard to pronounce. Please overlook that part of the sermon.

The basic outline of the movie revolves around elderly, pious, Protestant sisters Martine and Filippa who lived in a small village on the remote western coast of Jutland in 19th-century Denmark. Their late father was a pastor who founded his own Pietistic church. Lacking new converts, the aging sisters presided over a dwindling, elderly congregation.

Forty-nine years before, the sisters had many suitors, but their father rejected them, to retain the women's assistance with his pastoral mission. Martine was courted by a young Swedish cavalry officer, Lorens Löwenhielm. Filippa was courted by the famous baritone Achille Papin. He was on break from the Paris Opera. Both sisters spurned their suitors and stayed with their father.

Thirty-five years later, Babette Hersant appears at their door. She carries a letter from Papin which explains that she is a refugee from Paris and he recommends her as a housekeeper. The sisters cannot afford to employ Babette, but she begs to work for free. Babette serves as their cook for the next fourteen years, producing improved versions of the bland meals typical of this non-alcohol drinking congregation, gaining their respect, and that of the locals.

Babette's only link to her former life is a lottery ticket. A Parisian friend annually renews the ticket. One day, she wins the lottery and receives 10,000 francs. After her win she decides to prepare a dinner for the sisters and their small congregation on the occasion of the founding pastor's one hundredth birthday. More than just a feast, the meal is an outpouring of Babette's appreciation, an act of self-sacrifice.

The seven-course menu in the film consisted of: "Potage à la Tortue" (turtle soup) with Amontillado sherry; "Blinis Demidoff" (buckwheat pancakes with caviar and sour cream) with Veuve Clicquot Champagne; "Cailles en Sarcophage" (quail in puff pastry shell with foie gras and truffle sauce) with Clos de Vougeot Pinot Noir; an endive salad; assorted cheeses and fruits with Sauternes; "Savarin au Rhum avec des Figues et Fruit Glacée" (rum sponge cake with figs and candied cherries) with more Champagne.

Babette's gifts break down their distrust and superstitions, elevating them spiritually. Old wrongs are forgiven, ancient loves are rekindled and a mystical redemption of the human spirit settles over the table.

Bereft, the sisters assume that Babette will return to Paris. However, when she says that all her money is gone and that she's not going anywhere, the sisters are aghast. Babette then reveals that she was formerly the head chef of the Café Anglais, where a dinner for twelve cost 10,000 francs. Martine tearfully says, "Now you will be poor the rest of your life", to which Babette replies, "An artist is never poor." Filippa then says: "But this is not the end, Babette. In paradise you will be the great artist God meant you to be" and then embraces her with tears in her eyes saying: "Oh, how you will enchant the angels!"

From Babette's Feast we now turn to the feast of the Lord our God, the Heavenly Banquet Feast. Here the feast will take place on a mountain, in Zion, in heaven. Here the Host is not a French Head Chef, but the Lord of Hosts Himself. The Hosts refers to all the heavenly angels. God is cooking for all people, and the angels are waiting on them. We're all invited. You're invited to this feast with rich food and well aged wine.

It's not described in our text as a seven-course meal like Babette put on, but rather a two-course meal with a very odd appetizer. It seems that when the people are invited, they're all covered with a veil. If you've ever seen a sporting event where a big flag is going around the stadium, you have to realize that the people under the flag can't see the game.

The people invited to this feast can't see the feast. They can smell the rich food and the aroma of the wine. It's like when you have a potluck meal at church that's being set up during the service and all during the service you can smell the rich foods and the coffee brewing, but you can't eat it. You have to wait and wait, until the sermon is over, and the pastor stops praying, and finally gives the blessing and the dismissal.

Twice the people say in our reading that they have been waiting. Are you waiting for turkey and cranberry sauce, mash potatoes and turnip, pumpkin pie with ice-cream and whip cream, and to top it off a nice glass or two of wine? Well, if you are, you'll have to continue to wait, because like I said, first comes the odd appetizer.

So, there you are waiting for this delicious two course meal of rich food and well aged wine. You can smell the aroma, your mouths are watering, your stomachs are grumbling, and you can no longer concentrate on the sermon. All you can think of is this meal that's just out of your grasp. You can't even see it, because you're under a veil – the veil of death.

Death is coming to dinner. The turkey had to die to prepare our meal, but we have to die because of sin. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a), and death will come to all of us. Because of sin we're all under the veil of death. There's no escaping it. It's hard to think about a church service, let

alone a good meal, when you're dying. You're gasping for that last breath, and you think there's no hope. Then along comes Jesus, the Lord of Hosts, and He sits down with you and asks you why you're not eating the meal that He has prepared for you. He sees you crying and lamenting about death, forever being separated from God the Father in heaven. And then Jesus tells you that death is not the end, it's the passageway to the life to come.

You don't believe Him. You don't touch your food that you still cannot see, and so Jesus grabs the appetizer and swallows death. Jesus eats what covers all people, the curse of Sin. He pays for that with a terrible form of indigestion as He screams from the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). He dies from a terrible food poisoning after He eats your sins, and you walk away with heads hung low thinking that the feast is over. It will never be. The hope of the heavenly feast slowly drains from you like that last drop of gravy. There's nothing left for you.

Nothing left to do but mourn that there's no more gravy. There'll never be any more gravy. There's no hope. There's only deep grief. You mourn deeply for three days. There's no Thanksgiving Monday. What's there to be thankful for? You mourn until Jesus shows up three days later, with the napkins from the table and He wipes your tears away, and says, "I'm back! It's death that's gone. The heavenly feast is still on and you're all invited."

"The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23b). In Jesus you get to live forever. You get to feast forever. We can't even count how many courses there are to be in this meal of rich food and well aged wine. Right now we're waiting, but our hope is on the Mountain, in Zion, in Heaven. There the Lord of Hosts is preparing for us a heavenly feast of rich food and well aged wine.

You're saved from this veil of eternal death by the love of God, by the grace of God, by the cross of Christ, and by His resurrection three days later. We all deserve death because of our sins, but Jesus won eternal life for you. He defeated your sin. The devil is even defeated, and very soon death itself will be undone.

And because God loves you, Jesus has not only prepared a place for you in His heavenly mansion, but He has also prepared a feast for you. Jesus has already gathered many people to that feast, maybe some of them have been your loved ones who have died before you. Jesus now sends you a personal invitation to this feast, to feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, your loved ones, and Jesus.

He has the napkin in hand ready to wipe away your tears, and we wait for Him and His feast, no matter how long it takes, because we know that we'll be glad, and we'll rejoice in His salvation. Amen.