

Sermon :: 11-Oct-2026
Proper 23, Year A

“ Go ... into the ... streets, and invite [in] everyone you find ”

Sometimes, it's kind of nice to know *God* has some of the *same* problems *we* do!¹

One of *mine*, I'll confess, are those last fifteen or twenty stressful, wondering minutes before guests arrive for dinner or a party: Is the music too loud? Did we make enough food? Will people have a good time? And maybe most fundamental of all: Is anyone actually going to *show up*?

It's the *same* problem facing the king, who represents *God* in the parable Jesus tells today. He's laid out quite a spread for his son's wedding reception: the finest champagne... a lavish cold seafood bar² ... butler-passed hors d'oeuvres ... towering cake ... *both* a cool jazz combo *and* the hottest DJ in town. But *then*—my *own* worst nightmare—*no* one shows up! And in St Matthew's telling, they don't even offer any *excuses*.³ Although they've RSVP-ed, now they just blow the king *off*: [*breezily*] Changed my mind—not coming.

But here's where God and we differ: While *I'd* probably slip into a *deep funk* if none of *our* guests showed up ... God—after, I recognize, some ugly moments of urban warfare that aren't the *point* of Jesus' story—just *throws open* the *doors*: sends out servants to “invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.” And in they come: packing the place to capacity and enjoying all hospitality the king can lay on them.

>> When the *people* don't come to *you* ... *you* go to the *people*.

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We're approaching the *official* end of our stewardship campaign for 2027: the time, each year, when we ask every parishioner to prayerfully consider, discern and then commit to the amount of money that they'll dedicate to All Souls', next year, to support the mission and ministries of this parish. And our theme this year is ROOM TO GROW: celebrating the *abundance* God has given us ... and then *sharing* it, in as many ways and with as many people as we can. Over the last few weeks we've talked about our ¶ROOM TO GROW in *service*—sharing Jesus' love, tangibly, with others, without judgment; ¶our ROOM TO GROW *numerically*—especially through our calling an associate rector who can help us GROW our ministries for families with school-age children ... GROW our small groups ... GROW our perspectives and our aspirations; and ¶our ROOM TO GROW *spiritually*—widening and deepening the many offerings for learning and exploring, reflecting on and experimenting with new ways-of-faith that we offer.

And so, finally, *this* week, I'd like us to think about our ROOM TO GROW in *WITNESS*: in the ways we *reach out* to ... come *alongside* ... and are *true neighbors* to ... the wider community that lives just beyond all these blue doors of ours. I use the word *WITNESS* because what we're talking about is

¹ I'm being facetious, and I really don't *mean* this: God, eternal and omnipotent, doesn't *have* problems ... although God, in Christ, *is* in the midst of all *ours*, *with* us.

² Yes, I get the irony: A Jewish king wouldn't have a seafood bar with shellfish.

³ Compare Luke 14:16-24, where the invited guests all beg off, using some variant of “Sorry, something's come up!”

neither *service*—tangible, and often desperately needed, material assistance ... nor *recruitment*⁴—an intentional effort to get people to attend *worship* here or otherwise ‘join’ All Souls’. *WITNESS* is something *different*: a standing *up*—maybe even a standing *out*—in the community and *opening* our doors ... *sharing* our *resources* ... getting to *know* our neighbors, and *they* us. Asking what they *long for*, and how *we* might *provide* it ... asking what they *dream* of, and how *we* might help *realize* it.

[8:00] While it’s emphatically *not* true that ‘no one’ is coming to the ‘banquets’ *we* throw here every Sunday—just look around! ... it *is* true that, for a couple *decades* now, our neighbors have been much less likely to seek us *out* and *befriend* us. Indeed,]

[10:15] It’s emphatically *not* true that ‘no one’ is coming to the ‘banquets’ *we* throw here every Sunday—just look around! And families *are*, indeed, finding us: In just a few minutes, we’ll baptize Ataleia and Ophelia, perhaps our two youngest parishioners, into the Resurrection Life of Jesus Christ—Amen! Nevertheless,]

the size and capacity of this very space are testaments to an era of so-called Christendom, when families would almost as readily find a local *church* to *take* their children to as a local *school* to *send* them to. That was an *inward* model: *Build* it, and they will *come*.

Today, however, almost all of the ‘church of the future’ literature points in a different direction: *outward*. Go *find* your neighbors and *meet* them. Go *speak* with your neighbors and *learn* their *lives*. Go *listen* to your neighbors and *understand* their *wants* ... *partner* with their *opportunities* ... offer to help them *solve their problems*, great and small.

This is the same take-a-breath-adjust-your-expectations-and-come-up-with-a-Plan-B approach that the *king—God—takes*. When the people he was *expecting* to show up for his party—the people he’d planned and spent and counted on—don’t *come* ... the king cries, “Open *more* doors ... set *more* places ... light *more* candles ... uncork *more* bottles ... and just let them *come in*. I don’t know *them*, and *they* don’t know *me* ... but let’s just sit down together and get to know one *another*.” (Yes, I acknowledge, Jesus’ story doesn’t end well for *one* of the guests ... who doesn’t accept the king’s hospitality on the king’s terms—who wants to have it his *own* way. But remember that Jesus is telling this parable to His committed religious enemies and persecutors, who want to have *God* on *their* own terms, rather than on *God’s*.) Think of all the ROOM the king has TO GROW—in *WITNESS* to his neighbors; in *meeting* them; in *sharing* with them—that night!

And think of all the room *we* have to grow—in *WITNESS* to *our* neighbors; in *meeting* them; in *sharing* with them—*right now*!

- What if we promoted our *labyrinth* as an attractive, inviting practice to ‘try on’ for all who walk or jog or bike by it, *every day* ... advertised our unused *nursery* as an attractive, inviting place to gather for a cup of coffee or let the little ones play or catch up with friends, for all the Silver Gate parents who come here *twice* a day ... touted our *courtyard* as an attractive, inviting place to eat lunch, read a book, do a crossword or snooze in the sun for all the neighbors who just want a brief change of scenery, *any day*? We have *all* this ROOM TO GROW ... and we need to let our neighbors *know* about it
- What if we held summer movie nights or concerts on the courtyard ... offered lectures or exhibits or craft classes in Gooden Hall ... or opened our mostly-empty-most-of-the-time

⁴ I was going to say “not evangelization” (that *E* word, again!), but that wouldn’t be correct. Everything we do that confidently, hopefully and genuinely projects the love of God we live in and the hope of Christ that sustains us, in one way or another, *is* evangelization.

offices upstairs in the Admin Building to local groups who need space for a morning, a day or a week?

We have *all* this ROOM TO GROW ... and we need to let our neighbors *know* about it

- What if—and now I’m aiming *really high!*—we acknowledged the lament of so many of our local seniors who are outliving their financial resources and can no longer afford to live in Point Loma, after being here for *decades* ... and we started dreaming about building affordable senior citizen housing on our parking lot, with parking for *us below*, housing for *them above*, and offices and meeting space for *everyone in between*? We have *all* this ROOM TO GROW ... and we need to let our neighbors *know* about it
- Or what if we simply started by opening the massive (and, in truth, forbidding) blue doors to this church every day and inviting our neighbors to come in and sit for a while, basking in its beauty and pausing in its peace ... or if we designated our parking lot a safe place for children to bike and teens to skateboard on certain afternoons ... or if we just put a sign out there by that nice new tree we’re planting on the plaza that read, “Come and sit a while, dear friend”? We have *all* this ROOM TO GROW ... and we need to let our neighbors *know* about it

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We are—and I am *absolutely convinced* about this—a reservoir of *welcome* ... an offering of *peace* ... a fountain of *grace* ... for our neighbors that’s just waiting—almost *bursting*—to emerge like a flower from the soil. All we need to do is *invite* them: plan a simple event or maybe dream a big dream; open a closed door or maybe sacrifice an empty space; put up a *sign* of welcome or maybe become widely known as the ‘*church that welcomes*.’ We can work out all the details, over time.

The *important* thing, right *now*, is your *support*. Will you, through the pledge you make for 2027, help launch a new chapter in All Souls’ history here in Point Loma? Help us be a witness to God’s love, in wanting to *meet* our neighbors ... a witness to Christ’s sacrifice, in *sharing* with them ... a witness to the Holy Spirit’s abiding presence, in *befriending* them? We have so, so much ROOM TO GROW right on this campus ... and across this whole neighborhood. And so, I ask you: Will you help us invite our *neighbors* in, to *feast* with us?

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