

[Speaker 1]

If anyone asks, "When can I finally eat?" It's almost here, yes, but first I'll talk a little more. It's a bit of torture, I know.

But today, I'm not giving one long sermon; instead, I'm giving two. Two parts, two impulses. It's more like I'm sharing thoughts around the text Christoph has just read, and then there's time for food, drinks, and conversation.

You can talk about what I've said, about whatever's on your mind, about the delicious food. So there's no follow-up question, so to speak. But here are a few of my thoughts on the Bible passage Christoph just read, and then there's time for you.

So, in a nutshell, in case you were thinking about something else and weren't listening, here's the quick summary: A man, a big feast, many people are invited, but no one shows up. One has bought a field, another an ox, a third has just gotten married.

The man, the host, gets angry, sends out his servants, and says, "Bring everyone you can find. The people on the fringes of society." He does that, and then there's still room, and somehow the place doesn't fill up. So, a big meal, to which everyone has been invited, and there's still room.

It could almost symbolize our church service. Yes, we invited a large crowd, but somehow the place didn't fill up. So, now we're all going out and inviting people, something like that.

My first thought was, why not everyone? It's a parable by Jesus, where he wants to tell us something about God or the kingdom of God. Then he tells a parable where the man who represents God invites a small, elite circle, and then, when they don't come, he says, "Okay, let's bring the rest in." So, question to God, question to Jesus: why isn't the parable about God holding a great banquet and inviting everyone he could find?

Why does it take so long? Possible answers could be that, in principle, the story of the God of the Bible is also similar, namely that in the Old Testament, he is a God of Israel. In the Old Testament, we do have a relatively clear distinction between the people who belong to God's people, the Israelites, and the others.

So maybe it's also a retelling of this story. It wasn't until Jesus that things became truly globalized, and everyone was on board. Then the text says—I don't know exactly what the translation was, I didn't listen that closely—Christoph invited many.

And then there's always the question: What does "many" mean? Doesn't "many" perhaps also mean that the host invited everyone, but not everyone felt invited, like, who am I to go to this guest's house? I don't even have white clothes, so I guess I'm not invited.

Yes, that could resonate without it being explicitly stated. But perhaps the parable also makes it clear, in principle, or reinforces the fact that sometimes God's invitation to everyone only becomes truly clear when others decline. So, to put it simply, perhaps when there are many empty seats at the table, the congregation becomes aware of whom we haven't invited yet. But if the place is always sufficiently full, then you say to yourself, well, fine, if enough people come, then it doesn't matter if others don't come.

And one final thought: one should never overuse parables. Yes, so perhaps my question about the parable is the wrong one: why not all of them? That's also possible.

Second thought: I think the parable is quite powerful. It couldn't be made clearer that there's room for everyone at God's table. Regardless of status, background, life situation, or whatever the motives in this parable. So, basically, the host is saying, "Stay out until everyone is there."

I want everyone to know they're invited. But that raises a question. My third thought: What exactly is God's house or God's table?

It's a parable, or something like that: God is our man, we're having a banquet. If we apply that to ourselves, what's it all about? Where is God inviting us? Does he invite us into faith, or does he invite us into the church?

Is this the table of God or just an image of it? Is it perhaps about eternity, not something earthly at all, but something we somehow only experience or feel after life? Before the actual parable, Jesus says a sentence: Blessed is he who is allowed to participate in the kingdom of God.

This could indicate that Jesus is actually primarily concerned with what is eternal. But one question about the parable, one you might also be able to use to start the conversation: What is the Kingdom of God?

Is this here? Is it there? What is the table of God?

What is the parable about if we apply it to ourselves? My fourth thought: I think this story of Jesus presents a pretty significant challenge for us as a congregation, for me as a pastor, but I would say also for every Christian, for everyone who feels somehow connected to the Christian church. Because if we think about who God invites, or how God invites, then I think it's not far to ask ourselves how we actually invite, and who we actually invite.

Two examples: When I was a student, I worked for Hinz & Kunz, the Hamburg street newspaper, and they all knew that I wanted to be a pastor and that I believed in God and all that. That always led to really good and interesting conversations, and of course I was happy to invite people to my events back then. I still remember one of the Hinz & Künstler people saying to me at some point, "Jonas, I don't think God is so stupid after all. We can talk about it. I think what you do is great, but I'll never come to your service."

But not because I don't like you, but because I don't feel comfortable there. I always feel like people are looking at me, and it wasn't a homeless person who obviously smelled or was obviously in a bad mood. He had himself physically and everything under control, so to speak. That wouldn't have been noticeable from my perspective. But he says, I feel like people are looking at me. There are the smart ones, the intellectuals. The pastor is always giving a speech, and I don't feel comfortable there.

So, no offense, Jonas, but I'm not coming. And a second example: there were studies on which people actually baptize their children. Feel free to guess and call in: What do you think is one of the groups of people who least often have their children baptized?

Anyone have any ideas? Not now? Let the artist know.

Without a high school diploma? So one of the main groups were single parents, because the reasoning was, if I go up there alone, I'll be exposing my status by standing there alone. Which, of course, if you think about it, is nonsense, because it could certainly be solved, but it means that people don't feel invited to baptize their child because they themselves feel uncomfortable with the way we often celebrate baptism.

So, two examples of how, when we ask ourselves as a congregation how we invite and who we invite, it's not just about making a nice flyer or inviting someone in some other way, but often that begins long before the inviting aspect begins. I would never have thought that if I stood up at the front of a baptism, some people would think, oh God, I'll never perform a baptism if I have to stand up there. So, when we ask ourselves as a congregation who we invite and how, I think we often have to ask ourselves this question much earlier than we realize.

Fifth thought: And then you can finally eat and talk on your own. Jesus loved fellowship at the table. Well, he's not described in great detail, but either he had a very good metabolism or he didn't eat that much, but he loved sitting with people, and perhaps even lying down and eating.

That was his thing, and certainly because he loved to eat, but I also think that then, as now, eating together is about being on equal terms. When you sit at the same table and eat the same food, you meet on a different level than perhaps otherwise in life or in other situations. So I think that for Jesus there was more to it than just the food. When Jesus sat down at a table with people where other people had said, "I would never shake hands with them" or something like that, that was also an expression of his love for humanity.

There's something very appreciative about eating together, and that applies within the family, personally, and in the community. Inviting someone and saying, "I'd like to have dinner with you," can of course also be interpreted as a date. Of course, you have to be careful how you phrase it.

But first of all, it can be an expression of, "I value you so much that I want to share my food with you." That's difficult, of course. If we take Joe and the artist, for example, the homeless person, then I realize that it would be

a very big hurdle if I were to say, "Invite them to your house and have something to eat together." It's a very big hurdle, but there are many different levels.

There's also the option of saying, 'Would you like to go to a café with me? I'll buy you a coffee and we'll chat for a while.' There's also the option of buying a roll and sitting down on the street with you and saying, 'Come on, I'll get down to your eye level and we'll have a quick meal together here.' For a brief moment, we have fellowship, for a brief moment, we're on equal terms.

And it doesn't even have to be someone homeless. Compared to Hamburg, we have a very high number of people living alone here in Lohrbrügge. People who live alone aren't necessarily lonely, but chances are they often eat alone if they don't actively go out. So, there are certainly enough people in our area who eat alone often enough and think to themselves, well, I'd be happy to share at least a few meals with other people, so I don't always have to eat alone here.

That's why I'm thinking, perhaps we can take Jesus as a role model more often, so that he can be a role model for us in how we invite people to share a meal with us, to share a meal with us, to eat together. So, here are a few of my thoughts, quickly summarized in case you've dropped out along the way. For me, the text is both an invitation and a challenge.

The question: What exactly is the house of God? Jesus as a role model in how we interact with people, especially in the question: Can he be a role model for us, inviting someone to dinner? Perhaps an incentive to go out to dinner with someone again, or to go out to dinner with someone for the first time.

And this fundamental question: How welcoming are we, and where do we as a community perhaps need to start asking where we could be more welcoming? Perhaps you've gotten stuck on completely different points, perhaps you've been sitting here for ten minutes thinking, "I want to talk about something else." Feel free.

There's time now, but we haven't defined how much time. We said we'll see. If we notice that no one is talking and there's no one there, then we'll move on.

But there are at least a few minutes to eat and talk with people. Of course, you can also move a little closer together if you say, "I don't have a life here to talk about," then feel free to move around so that it fits. And I say, enjoy your meal and have a good chat.

And in about three or four hours, I'll say, that's enough now, we're moving on. So, you can keep eating, and Leo will keep exploring, and our dog will keep begging because he doesn't understand why the dogs here get so little to eat. It's a dog-crying injustice, or something like that.

I have fewer this time, but I'll give you another round of thoughts so you have fresh food to talk about or think about while you eat. We're still on the same topic. So, the same parable: Jesus' banquet, the man who invited the people who didn't come, and so on.

Just in case you've lapsed into a brief bout of dementia while eating. Sixth thought: The kingdom of God is a feast.

Jesus is kind of talking about what the Kingdom of God is like, and he's talking about the big celebration. In the past, people would have called it a huge party or something like that. I don't know what they say these days to really emphasize that.

But there is celebration, there is eating. It's not a burden in any way, but rather full of joy. And apparently, one enters this kingdom of God through an invitation.

Not by working for it or somehow, by going to church often enough, or by wearing white often enough, or not. So it's an invitation that comes from God to people, and apparently you can say, no, forget it, I have better things to do. So there's no pressure, an invitation to attend a big celebration.

That's how I understand the Kingdom of God as it's presented in this parable. The seventh thought has something to do with the invitation, the excuses of others. Those originally invited decline because they consider other things more important or more important to them.

That's the property, the field, which they somehow want to buy, but have just bought. The work, those are the oxen in the story. These are personal relationships. I say, I just got married, but you, I can't enter the kingdom of God right now.

The reasons themselves aren't all bad. Work isn't bad, possessions aren't inherently bad. Personal relationships certainly aren't bad.

I don't think Jesus' point in this story is to somehow speak negatively about these things or to say you shouldn't have all of these things. They're simply being used here to say, "I don't have time for your invitation right now, dear Lord. Come back next time, after we've celebrated our silver wedding anniversary. Let me know, or if I get in touch in between."

So, very importantly, it's not that these things are bad, but they can stand between us and God. There are inherently beautiful things in our lives that we might use as an excuse to distance ourselves from God. And so, perhaps it's too personal for a conversation, but perhaps it's a question to take with you: consider whether there are inherently beautiful things in your life that are good, that are allowed to be, but that sometimes also keep you from God or lead you away from him.

And it's not about all of this no longer being allowed. So, to stay with the parable here—and I know one shouldn't overuse parables—you're invited to a party and you would have turned back anyway. So, in this parable, it's not about the ox dying, the field no longer being able to be cultivated, and the marriage having to end.

In this parable, it's only for this one moment that other things are more important than following God's invitation. Eighth, what does faith actually mean? What does faith actually mean?

This parable is told in a situation where, as I think I already mentioned, it says something like this: whoever is allowed to partake of the meal in the Kingdom of God is blessed, so to speak. Depending on the translation, there are different versions. Fundamentally, I believe it's also about what we call faith today. That it's about the question: Who is the Kingdom of God for?

For whom is this perhaps somehow promised to believers, what they can experience, what they can feel? In principle, one could perhaps say that faith means following the invitation and taking a seat at God's table. Faith means I follow the invitation, I accept it.

There would be something active, but also something passive, because then you're sitting at the table and eating. So, faith, okay, sit at God's table and enjoy your meal. Have a nice day.

I don't want to disparage it. I believe that it can be faith, and indeed it is faith. But I would also say that faith can, at least, go beyond that.

Namely, that it also has an inviting and serving character. Think not only as sitting at the table, but also as seeing the empty seat and asking who might be sitting there. Think not as just sitting at the table, but also as serving.

Today we're doing a hybrid. You bring something, you sit down at the table. Maybe you've invited people or brought them along.

I imagine it's similar with faith. The basic thing, sitting down at the table, is something I accept as an invitation from God, and then I'm allowed to stay there. I don't think anything more is needed to be able or allowed to participate in the Kingdom of God.

That's not in the parable either, it's not there. The invited guests were only allowed in if they could prove that they were invited and were there, and that was it. But faith can and should, I believe, go further.

Little spoiler: We also have a little event planned for you that might have something to do with this. It was Marlene's idea, if anyone asks. Ninth thought: There's still room.

In this parable, they can't quite fill the place. Everyone is invited, they run out into the street and say, "Come on, everyone, there's free food, it's a great party, come on in, and somehow, there's still room." Now you could say, "Oh, that's a shame, actually." So God needs help with public relations or marketing.

But on the positive side, there's always room in the Kingdom of God. It's not just the chosen few, and when they arrive, the door is closed like with the oak ear, and now the flood after us. There's always room in the Kingdom of God, which also means you can't really invite enough.

If we apply this to ourselves as a congregation, meaning if the church becomes too small, then we simply have to expand. There's always room in the Kingdom of God. Perhaps—I've already considered leaving a few chairs free.

Well, I was relatively sure that they wouldn't all be full. That's good, because otherwise my idea, which I want to share with you, would have been stupid. But with an eye on maybe a free seat to your left, right, or next to you, maybe there are people you'd say I could have sat in.

Well, actually, that would have been something for him or her today. A service, yes, in the church, yes, but I could imagine that person could have been sitting here. Good news, we'll be holding the service again on the 23rd.

May, Friday, May 23rd, 7 p.m., and perhaps you'd like to take the motivation from the parable, invite someone, and say, "I have a service that might be something for you." So, there's still room for you here.

Summary of my thoughts, second round: The Kingdom of God is a celebration. It's about joy, about abundance, about excess, like what's on our table today. But this parable can also make us question where our priorities sometimes lie.

This can be uncomfortable, even when you're dealing with things that are truly beautiful, but that can sometimes distract you from God, even if it's just for an evening or a certain amount of time. This fundamental question: What does faith mean to you? How active do you want?

How much of the passive aspect of faith do you consider? For you personally, but also with regard to the people around you. I know that some people find it difficult to bear when faith is only passive.

So, this: they just sat down at the table and he just sat there and ate, but that, of course, is also faith, sitting at the table and eating. But perhaps this is also a challenge for you personally, to use the parable as motivation, to see the empty seats and say, who could be sitting there? Who could I invite?

Who could I bring? You might also be thinking, don't stop talking, I want to keep eating. The time has come.

So feel free to eat plenty, discuss my thoughts, or whatever triggered or triggered this, or even Donald Trump and falling stock prices. So feel free to talk about whatever's on your mind, and afterward, there's something else: the invitation. If you say we had an idea in our group that we'd like to share with everyone, then feel free to do so, with a microphone, loudly for everyone, and please keep it brief and concise. Don't try to deliver a third sermon.

But if you say we have an idea that I can explain in two or three sentences and I'd like to share with you, please come to me right away. Then we can share it with everyone after the next round, and then there will be a little activity. Don't worry, you don't have to do anything else today, but I promise that will happen. Now, go eat again and feel free to go around, take things, share. We're on the right track to getting everything, and when it's all gone, Petra will bring in more.

So, you don't have to worry about that. Period. If you're at home—I hope you're eating and wearing white—I'd love to see pictures.

So if you're also dressed in white at home right now—just if you're wearing something, not naked—please share pictures of yourself joining us in worship digitally. We'd love to see them.

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