

**80 + years ago, Paul and Elizabeth Sanders founded a “house by the side of the road”
where EVERYONE was welcome...**

those with faith,

those without,

those who were good...

and those who needed shall we say, a bit of help to be good, ...

and those who lives were in chaos due to alcohol addiction.

Those who were looking for a bit of peace

a bit of nature,

a bit of relaxation...

a bit of celebration....

No matter what you needed,

and even if you didn't know what it was you needed...

Elizabeth and Sandy welcomed you so that you would

have the opportunity to your life, find yourself, and your God

Now I know I'm preaching to the choir: cuz we are all here!

this is not a meditation in praise of the Center....really, it's not!

But I think it is safe to say that we all feel as if we have found

a little slice of heaven here at The Center,

whether we hang out at the farm

or in the art cabins

or attend the programs in the Lodge...

What I think The Center does so very well is to be inclusive of all people...

We don't say “You are welcome to join us if...”

and then put all sorts of qualifiers in place...

It seems to me that Sandy and Elizabeth got something very, very right...

Every source that I consulted this week regarding this reading stressed,

as the primary understanding of this passage,
the inclusivity of God's invitation to all peoples...

You are invited to the banquet!

No qualifiers, no exceptions, no 'ifs'...

All invited to the Banquet....

Now...This reading is an allegory...

which means that every person and every event in the story
is meant to represent someone or something else.

The king is meant to represent God.

The king in this story starts out by inviting his friends and peers...
his inner circle.

That represents humanity's long belief that God likes
certain people more than others, that God has an inner circle...
that some are closer to God than others...

This part of the story affirms our usual way of living and being in relationship.

We have circles of friends...some are closer to us than others.

Some get invited to our kids' weddings and we are willing to pay
for their dinner...some people are definitely not!

This makes sense to us, on a very ordinary, human level.

But, this story goes on to say,

those close friends found reasons or perhaps, excuses, why they could not attend the
wedding so the King reaches out beyond his inner circle...

he reaches out to everyone in the country.

This, the scholars say, is meant to represent God's outreach

to all people, beyond those who consider themselves chosen or saved....

to those on the margin

to those who feel like they don't quite belong or fit in or perhaps aren't good enough to be in God's inner circle of friendship.

This is the challenge of the reading...

do we consider ourselves part of God's inner circle or one of those on the margin...one of the outsiders?

If we think of ourselves as an insider...

the next question would be 'are we taking time to go to the banquet'?

The image of a banquet is one of the oldest and most frequently used images in the Judeo Christian Tradition for heaven.

Banquets are joyous occasions...

Banquets are lavish!

Usually the finest silverware is used,

flowers decorate the tables...the room is beautiful

and the Food is abundant...

often there is music and dancing...

people have fun at a banquet!

Such is the Reign of Heaven...the prophets have tell us...

The Reign of Heaven is characterized by joy, abundance and celebration!

If Jesus proclaimed the inbreaking Reign of Heaven on Earth,

do we take time to notice the beauty,

the abundance, the joy,

that is right here, right now...

no matter our circumstances?

Or do we say...I'll be happy when...x, y or z happens

I'll appreciate the beauty later....

I'll celebrate tomorrow, for it is to late today...

**Do we find excuses or reasons not to attend the banquet
that is set before us right here, right now...**

**and so a follow up question for those who consider themselves an insider is:
are we resentful that God opens up the invitation to all?**

**If we find excuses why we aren't celebrating or forgiving or loving,
are we jealous or upset that God invites 'them',
those people???......**

Ahhh....But what if we consider ourselves one of the outsiders?

Well...you know I'm spiritual but not religious....

you know I haven't been the kindest or the most generous...

I've done a fair amount of things I'm not proud of...

If we are one of THOSE people....

Can we hear God say to us: ...

Come! YOU are invited to the banquet...

Come feast on Love...

Come celebrate forgiveness...

Come relish in beauty and joy...

Come....don't delay: the table is set, the celebration has begun...

**Earth is a planet of magnificent beauty: mountains and rivers,
star studded skies and glorious sunrises...people of all cultures and all colors...
creatures great and smallahh...the list goes on...**

No matter what our situation is in life have we noticed the beauty?

have we paused long enough to stand in wonder and with awe?

Look around....love is everywhere!

Love soothes an aching heart and awakens us to all that is good and true.....

have we taken the time to notice?

Have we taken the time to say I'm sorry,

you are forgiven, I love you?

Have we taken God up on God's invitation like

Elizabeth and Sandy did 80 plus years ago

and invited others to 'feel the Love' that is all around

waiting to heal all that wounds us?

In other words....Are we willing to accept the invitation to the Banquet?

Amen