

Do you ever miss an opportunity? Have you ever missed an invitation?

About 11 years ago at this time of year, just before school started, I was hard at work on the computer at home. We had just finished shopping for school supplies and the children were all excited about what they had gotten. Natalie was going into the 2nd grade.

I was lost in thought, when Natalie came walking toward me and she started talking to me, "Dad, can you help me with something? It will only take a minute."

Unfortunately, my almost automatic response was, "Aaaggh, Natalie, not right now. I am kind of busy and I need to finish this up." I said all this without even looking up at Natalie. She stood for a moment looking at me, working at the computer. I could now see her out of the corner of my eye. Then she said, "Okay, I'll stop back later."

And she dropped her head and turned to walk away.

In the next few seconds, several thoughts came hurtling through my mind. I thought to myself, "Scott, in the long run what is the most important, this draft of the sermon, or the life of your daughter." I felt God had hit me between the eyes with my misplaced priorities.

I pulled away from the computer and I said, "Natalie, come here, what do you need?"

She stopped walking away. She turned and looked at me with excitement in her eyes and came running back. That is when I discovered that she had been playing with her new little calculator. She said, "Dad, I was wondering, what is 6 x 8?" I said, "48".

She punched in the numbers and said, "You're right!" Then she walked over and gave me a hug and said, "I love you dad."

In that embrace, I found myself thanking God for the moment and for the undeserved love of a little girl. And all I could say was, "I really love you too, Natalie." Then she went trotting off to do something else.

I almost missed an opportunity to spend time with my daughter, because I was so caught up in my work. Does that ever happen to you? Have you ever missed an opportunity to spend time with someone? Have you ever missed an invitation, because you were so busy?

In our scripture for today, Jesus is telling a story. He wants us to understand something about God. He says, *The kingdom of heaven is like a King who put on a wedding banquet for his son. He sent out his servants to call in all the invited guests. And they wouldn't come!*

He sent out another round of servants, instructing them to tell the guests, "Look, everything is ready. Come to the feast!"

But they only shrugged their shoulders and went about their business, one to weed the garden, another to work in his shop.

The King has prepared a banquet and those invited are too busy to come. They are too caught up in their world and in their life to make time for the king. When I was growing up we used to sing a song in Sunday School. I called it the Wedding Song, but it was a take off of this story. It went like this: *I can not come. I can not come to the banquet don't trouble me now. I have married a wife, I have bought me a cow. . . We used to mix up the words as children and say, I have married a cow, I have bought me a wife.*

While we can laugh about the words and the song, the point is pretty clear. We can too easily allow ourselves to get so busy, so caught up in living, that we miss chances to spend time with God. Do you ever allow yourself to become too busy? Are you missing invitations from God to take time? Are you so caught up in getting things done, that you have forgotten to attend to your soul?

We live in a world of production. We live in a society that has made a priority of getting things done. And while there is nothing inherently wrong with being productive and getting things done, if we do it to the point where we become so busy that we lose balance in our life, we run the risk of doing damage to our souls.

Life needs balance. Is your life out of balance? Are you connecting with God? Are you connecting with others?

If your life is out of balance? If you are feeling like something is missing? If you feel like you are on the outside looking in, then maybe it is time to pause and ask if you are taking time to respond to God's invitation to come to the banquet?

The King told his servants, "We have a wedding banquet all prepared but no guests. The ones I invited weren't up to it. So go out into the busiest intersections and invite anyone you find to the banquet. The servants went out and rounded up everyone they laid eyes on . . . and so the banquet was on - every place filled.

Our faith reminds us that God loves us and wants to throw a party to celebrate that love. And God's love can make all the difference for us.

Terri Vandermark knows a little about the power of love. She says, "On June 18th, I went to my little brother's baseball game as I always did. Cory was 12 years old at the time and had been playing baseball for a couple of years. When I saw that he was next at bat, I

decided to head over to the dugout and give him a few pointers. But when I got there, all I could say was simply, "Hey, I love you."

In return he asked, "Does this mean you want me to hit a home run?"

I smiled and said, "Do your best."

As he walked up to the plate, there was a certain aura about him. He looked so confident and so sure about what he was going to do. One swing was all he took and wouldn't you know, he hit his first home run!

He ran around those bases with such pride - his eyes sparkled and his face was lit up. But what touched me the most was when he walked back over to the dugout. He looked over at me with the biggest smile I've ever seen and said, "I love you too, Ter."

I don't remember if his team won or lost that game. On that special summer day in June, it didn't matter. Because I knew I was loved and so did my brother."

Love does that. It is a gift of God. It allows us to experience comfort and healing. That is why Jesus reminds us that God is inviting us to a party, a party to celebrate God's love for us. Are you hearing the invitation? Are you willing to respond positively to that invitation?

May God help us say yes, today and every day.

Amen