

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen.

This morning we have the well-known parable of the Great Banquet according to the Gospel of St. Luke. In Matthew's version, it is referred to as the "Wedding Feast" Both accounts give a picture of life in the Kingdom of Heaven and who will actually be there, although each is slightly different.

Sometime ago, a friend-of-a friend who was an Anglican in a different jurisdiction joined me for lunch. We engaged in the usual chit-chat, mostly about religious or spiritual things. At some point in the conversation the subject of Eschatology or the "final things" came up. Not too long into the conversation he commented, "I'm not sure if I'm going to heaven or not." Now understand, those of us in the clergy encounter those sorts of comments rather frequently. But knowing this man to be a Baptized, Confirmed, Churched, and "regular" Confession Anglican, I had to ask, "Why do you think you won't make it to heaven?" He shot back, "Well, maybe it is more of not knowing if I want to go to heaven. I don't like clouds and I have no interest in learning how to play a harp." Obviously being facetious, he was really saying, "Heaven seems boring." My response, "Well

instead of clouds or harps, how would you like to go to an endless party; an endless banquet with the best food, drink, and company?"

Well, that was a bit more appealing.

We saw a glimpse of that here last night and Fright night as well as we celebrated with Jamie and Mary Margaret.

From today's Gospel, among other places, one of the most consistent ideas in Jesus' parables is that heaven is going to be a great supper or a wedding banquet. That idea reaches its fruition in the Book of Revelation where the Lamb of God invites people to His own wedding feast.

At any rate, I would agree with my friend that if the choice is between a banquet and an endless harp concert, I'll take the banquet. But the main issue in today's parable is not what heaven is going to be like, but, rather, how one gets to heaven in the first place.

People in Jesus' day understood the concept of a grand party just as we do today. AND, once the invitation is offered, you can say "YES" or "NO" or "LET ME THINK ABOUT IT."

In today's parable when the invited guests learn that it is time to come to the supper, they all make excuses. One says, "I need to go look at some land; another, I just bought a new team of oxen; and finally, I

just got married.” Well, these original guests were all of the elite, or the “chosen people.” But they weren’t ready. So what does the host do? He invites all of the least likely. The sort of folk that the original invitees wouldn’t have been caught dead with. But you see, they were ready. Our Lord ends with the very chilling words, “I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.” The fact is that most of us live our lives more or less in the excuse-making mode. Baptism is a time of definite commitment-but we can push that off onto our well-meaning parents and godparents. But at Confirmation, the Bishop asks a question that the confirmand must answer directly, “Do you promise to follow Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?” This is precisely why in our tradition, those being confirmed have reached an age when they can understand, at least to some degree, the magnitude of their answer.

We travel through life, even if we are fairly serious churchgoers, excusing ourselves from one or another aspect of full commitment. “I don’t need to pray every day. There are some times when there are things that are more important on Sunday mornings than church. Bible reading can be taken too far, OR, God understands WHY I can’t keep His moral laws.”

But the truth is that God is calling us to a complete commitment and He is calling us right here and now. We're invited to the Great Banquet, The Great Supper, The Wedding Feast. The party begins here on earth as we grow more deeply committed to HIM and to enjoying the fruits of his love for us. The party continues through death and the grave, because nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. FINALLY, the party reaches its fulfillment and consummation in Heaven where Jesus marries us, his Church.

All we need to do is say YES. I'm coming. I want to be there now and I want to continue to be there throughout the rest of my life right on into ETERNITY.

God doesn't want to close the door on anyone-not on the Jews who rejected Jesus when he first came to earth, and not in our faces as we continue to grieve Him with our selfishness and disobedience.

In a matter of moments you will receive your invitation in the words, "You who do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins...draw near with faith." Today as you hear that invitation and make the confession that follows, make it a true commitment and not mere words so that we may enjoy "pardon, peace, and true repentance" on our journey to the Eternal Banquet.

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Amen.