

You Are Ready For The Wedding

It is important to be ready for weddings, isn't it? It is an important day. It is a joyful day. It is the sort of day that those involved plan weeks ahead of time, whether it's a small or large wedding. It's the sort of day in which you dress up and look your best. In the words we look at this morning, the apostle, John describes heaven and our re-uniting with Jesus as an amazing, wonderful, perfect wedding. And, in two separate ways he comforts us and reassures us with the fact that we are ready for the wedding. We, the Church are ready to meet our Groom, Jesus. John tells us: *19:1 After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, 2 for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants." 3 And again they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." "*

We are ready for the wedding banquet. And why is it that we are ready? Jesus has condemned the great prostitute. Hmmmm, maybe these words need some explaining. Who is this great prostitute? First of all, in the book of Revelation, John tells us that Satan makes use of two servants here on earth. The first is earthly governments who persecute and kill Christians. The second is even scarier. The second ally of Satan is the Christian church which looks Christian on the outside. But on the inside, it seduces Christians away from the true teaching of God's word. It is a church which says that Jesus died for your sins, but you can't be sure that when you die that you have been good enough to earn that forgiveness. It is a church that says in its official documents: *"If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing but trust in the divine mercy which forgives sins for Christ's sake let him be damned."*¹ This is the church that Martin Luther grew up in. It is a church which said that the price that Jesus paid wasn't enough to take away your sins. And she killed those who said that it was enough.

What does this disgusting woman and the church of Luther's time have to do with us? The same lies she spoke in Luther's time we hear in our ears today. They are lies which have torn people we know and love away from the truth of God's word. They are the lies which filter in our ears when we have to make a choice. On the one hand, we could choose a small Lutheran church which knows and holds to the truth. Or we could choose a large church which has activities and programs. And they sacrifice the truth for programs. That sort of church lies to us and tells us that we have to do things to earn Jesus' forgiveness. And, at first that sounds good. I want to be able to help myself and partner with Jesus so that I can get to heaven as a team. But then those seductive words enslave us. Because, if we have to trust in the things we have done in order to get into heaven, then we will never know if we have done enough. And, in those sort of circumstances, do you think that the false church would say to that sinner 'Don't worry about all the things you have done. You could never do enough to earn you own salvation, so Jesus has won it for you as a free gift.' Do you think that sort of church would speak these true words of comfort? No, if one is in doubt about his salvation, they just tell him to work harder and do more good. And so they plunge the hearts of so many into despair, because they see their sin. But they are robbed of the full salvation Jesus has won for them.

What bride would be ready to greet and marry her chosen man with the constant voices of lies in her ears? How could she be ready if all she heard was 'You need to be better to deserve him. You will never be good enough for him. He will never forgive all you have said and done. You had better prove how worthy you are of his love.' How could a bride be ready with those sorts of lies in her ears? How could Christ's bride, his church be ready for him when she hears these lies every day and sees people she loves torn away from Christ because of these lies? So, Jesus our Savior puts an end to the lies by putting an end to the prostitute. On Judgement Day we will be ready for our Savior because those lying voices will not be in our ears because the prostitute who said that we had to earn the forgiveness that Jesus had given to us as a gracious gift was now punished forever.

You are ready for the wedding. You are ready to meet your Savior in heaven. The prostitute who continues to lie to you will be punished forever. But, there is still one huge obstacle in the way of our wedding. False teachers

¹Trid. Sess. VI, Canon XII

have spoken lies to us. But we have listened to those lies. And, there have been times that we have been unfaithful to our fiancé. How can we be ready to be married when we have cheated on our fiancé and have not been faithful to him? For there have been many times that Jesus has told us in his word that he has the truth. But we did not trust him. When we were sad, we did not go to God's word for comfort. When we were happy, we did not thank our groom who was the one who gave us happiness and the reason for our happiness. Our groom promised that he would take care of us, but we did not believe him. We are not ready to be married because in so very many ways we have been unfaithful to him.

Our Savior and Groom has gone out of his way to make us ready, so that there is nothing we need to worry or be ashamed about. John tells us: *6 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our LORD God Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)* "

When we think of all the different ways we have sinned and have not been faithful to our groom, it makes us ashamed. It makes us fearful of meeting up with Jesus in heaven. But, notice how our Savior makes us ready: He gives us pure, holy, righteous clothes to wear. And these words are poetic language. So John lets us know what these clothes are. *"(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)"* Now, the NIV is a good translation of the original languages. But this is one area in which it is not as clear as it needs to be. Literally, it says that the *'fine linen is the continuous declarations of 'not guilty'* .

We are ready to go to the wedding feast. Jesus has washed away all of our adulteries against him. He has washed them away with his own blood poured out for us on the cross. And even more than that, we are ready because he gives us a pure, white, holy dress to wear. That dress is his perfect holiness which he gives to us. The result is that every time we might think that we are going to be there with the whore burning forever in hell, Jesus says: "you are not guilty". Every time we say "I have no right to wear this white dress because I am disgusting and sinful and ugly", he says: "I have made you pure and perfect and holy. You can wear this dress on the outside, because you are holy on the inside."

Christ has made you ready for your wedding banquet. So look forward to that day. But also, realize that our Groom and Savior has given us an appetizer of that feast. We find it in the LORD's Supper. When Jesus establishes the LORD's Supper, listen to what he says about it: *28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."*

Jesus doesn't just declare you "not guilty" on the last day, he declares you "not guilty" every time you receive his body and blood in his Supper. He doesn't just give you the joy of heaven after you are already there, he gives you joy and contentment before you are even there. We do not shout alleluias with saints and angels bowing down beside us right now. But we do join with them even now, because the Lamb that was slain is there in the LORD's Supper.

So then, my brothers and sisters, wait patiently for that banquet. And rejoice in the appetizers he gives us in the LORD's Supper week after week. His body and blood declares you 'not guilty'. His body and blood strengthens you in your fight against the lies Satan throws at you. And his body and blood gives you a beautiful foretaste of heaven.

You are ready for the Wedding. The Lamb of God has crushed the prostitute. The Lamb of God has clothed you in righteousness. Amen.