

Parable of the Great Banquet

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[0 : 00] A reduction to tell you that the Anglican Church is a worldwide historically accidental structure is in a struggle with death.

Or it could be in birth pangs of a new life. The Anglican Church can easily observe how the Pentecostal Church works, and how the Baptist Church works, and how the Christian Reformed Church builds schools, how the Mennonites create community, and the Plymouth Brethren learn personal discipleship.

Historically, the Anglican Church is designed to be a national church that is for the whole nation. The head of state is at least the nominal head of the church, and ideally every citizen of the nation is meant to be a member of the church.

That no longer applies, but that's where it was once upon a time. The local congregation provides for everyone the sacrament of baptism and Holy Communion, a pattern for the reading of the Bible, and the life cycle service of baptism, confirmation, marriage, sickness, and death.

And for the people totally immersed in the world, it is to keep them in touch with the reality of the kingdom through these services and through our regular worship and participation in this particular rehearsal banquet for the kingdom, which is the Holy Communion.

[1 : 55] When Baptists, when Baptists, and I know some of you are, when Baptists look at the Anglicans, they say, where does the new birth take place?

And when Pentecostals look at the Anglicans, they say, where in your liturgy is the personal encounter with the Holy Spirit?

When the Roman Catholics look at the Anglicans, they say, where does the Anglicans look at the Anglican Church? They say, the right understanding of the Bible comes from the Church, not vice versa.

You know, the Anglicans say the right understanding of the Church comes from the Bible. Well, there's that difference, which is probably a very healthy difference at the moment.

These are questions we all must face constantly. I mean, last night in the news driving home after dark, I heard that the Roman Catholic Church has just issued a statement on what the faith says, backed up by the scripture, about feminism.

[3 : 10] You no doubt will be interested to hear that if you haven't already. The whole Church, in all its parts, has the overall responsibility of confronting the world, the flesh, and the devil with the ultimate purpose of the triumph of the kingdom of God.

Now, I sat where you sit a week or so ago, and I was thrilled to be here, and just to listen to what was going on, and with an unmistakable sense of God's great blessing on this congregation, for which we need to be thankful, and we need to take responsibility.

God's blessing on the congregation. I heard news of the Vacation Bible School, where over 200 children for a week attended, and we cannot, I'm sure, take too seriously the responsibility of children.

So, children, I hope you will be glad to be here this morning. I'll try and be brief. I heard of the appointment of a full-time youth worker, which is entirely appropriate that that should happen. Sort of, youth work is generally handed to part-time people and volunteers, and the idea of a full-time youth worker seems a wonderful grace. I hear about the 11 young people who are in the Artidzo program to test their calling to the full-time ministry.

[5 : 00] And that's amazing, you know, that there are 11 such people from, mostly from this congregation. There are 20 or more students that are training for the ordained ministry in the Anglican Church through Regent College.

And the Anglican Studies program. And that's very impressive, if you know more about it. And in addition, something which we don't seem to get hold of, St. John supports, by prayer and money, almost 30 parachurch organizations.

And in almost every case, it is because there is a member of this congregation who is personally involved in those organizations.

Mission Fest, Crisis Pregnancy Center, Crossfire Ministries, Union Gospel Mission, Young Life, InterVarsity, Pacific Theater, Langham Trust, Lighthouse Ministries, Seeds of Hope, African Enterprise, Navigators, City and Focus, International Teams, North American Indian Mission, Campus Crusade, Ratanak Project, Ecclesia, Wycliffe Translator, Burkino Faso, Christa Ministries, SAMS Canada, Christian Reform Mission, Samaritan's Purse, Afghanistan, a concern for the province of Central Africa, to which two members of the congregation are going this summer to plan a major visit there for members of the congregation next summer.

The Diocese of Saskatchewan, the youth program in the Diocese of the Yukon, and Brother John Blythe in Melanesia. And I have no doubt that I haven't included some.

[7 : 03] But there are people representing most of those organizations and directly involved in them who are sitting with you this morning. Well, the business of the morning is to talk about the parable which comes in Luke chapter 14 and verses 15 to 24.

And when I talk about it, it's a very well-known story.

It appeared in the Manchester Guardian in effect this week. An article by one man was talking about the presidential race, and he said that the presidential candidates, Mr. Kerry and Mr. Bush, and he illustrated how they will be careful when they go to dinner that they don't go to dinner with the poor and the outcasts.

They're at the head table of the major corporations, and that's where they get their support. And that's politically the way we all work.

That's socially the way we mostly all work. And the idea of starting at the bottom that this parable suggests is not very popular.

[8 : 33] So, in the picture of this parable in chapter 14, Jesus finds himself in the house of a Pharisee enjoying the hospitality of that Pharisee and beginning by offending his host by performing a miracle in healing a man with dropsy.

And then that adds to his involvement as a member of the assembled guests, and an argument starts over the observance of the Sabbath.

Well, having done that, then Jesus moves in on the social climbers who are among the guests at this banquet put on by the Pharisees, and he puts his finger right on the most sensitive area by telling these social climbers not to seek the place of honor, but seek the lowest place.

He said there's lots of room at the bottom from which there is no way but up. And a limited amount of room at the top from which there is no way but down.

And he says that should be obvious. I personally find myself vastly in favor of going to lunch at the Vancouver Club rather than the Union Mission Gospel Hall.

[10 : 03] I don't know why that is, but you may appreciate it on the basis of your own experience. My shoes get shined, my suit gets cleaned, and generally speaking, yeah, well, there I am.

And then Jesus goes on to tell them that when they are planning their social life and the social season, which will begin in September, you may think about it in these terms, when you're planning your social life, don't get yourself in the trap of inviting those who can in turn invite you.

Otherwise, you'll just set up the cycle of you invite them and they invite you and you invite them and they invite you and on and on it goes. Don't get caught in that trap, Jesus says.

He said in verse 13, if you want to look at that, you must learn to invite those who could not possibly invite you in return. And Jesus says that you will find that much more rewarding.

And then in verse 15, we come to the actual parable that we're to look at today of the great banquet. And he said, that Jesus finds himself seated next to a very pious fraud who thinks to make conversation by saying in a holy voice, as he thinks about what Jesus has said.

[11 : 53] He says, blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God. You know, that kind of sick, pious talk that surrounds so much of religion.

Quiet aspirations that we don't really believe in at all. But we say them all the time. And he says that to Jesus. And making the assumption that both he and others will end up there and that they will live happily ever after, partaking of the banquet in the kingdom of God.

But Jesus says, think about that again. And he tells the man, for example, there is indeed a great banquet and we make the assumption that we will all be there and we live our lives in that happy assumption.

But Jesus breaks through the happy assumption with what actually happens. He tells the story of a great and wealthy man that anticipating all who had said they would come to his banquet and in fact they would come and so at great expense to himself he prepared to receive all his intended guests and all those who intended to be there.

Well, having prepared the feast, he sent his servant. Interesting to note that Luke writes servant, not servants.

[13 : 43] And it's suggested that that servant is indeed the Lord Jesus Christ coming into the world to bid us come to the banquet.

So, he sent his servant who announced to all the guests that the feast was now ready. the guests who had sincerely intended to be there had lived with the expectation that they would be there, suddenly discovered that the banquet was announced for a time and a place which interfered with their personal priorities.

And so, with great regret, they sent word by the servant that they would not be able to come.

From the time they had accepted the invitation to now, their priorities had shifted. And so, one of the great purposes of this parable is for you and I to look at how our priorities shift and we find ourselves not able to attend the banquet that we had always supposed we would be at.

And so, they said one and all, I cannot come to the banquet. Now, there was a chorus we all learned at camp once about that and since the children are here, I have some support here.

[15 : 16] I'll sing the chorus once and then all of you who know it sing it with me if you will and then everybody can sing it if you catch on to it quickly.

Will you be ready for that? All right, this is without Terry's permission. I cannot come to the banquet Don't trouble me now I have married a wife I have bought me a cow I have fields and commitments that cost a pretty sum Pray have me excused I cannot come Well done All together now I cannot come to the banquet Don't trouble me now I have married a wife I have bought me a cow I have fields and commitments that cost a pretty sum Pray have me excused

I cannot come and that was the predicament that the man who went and gave the great feast found himself in So what indeed was he to do?

Well, he got angry in the first place at the guests who were intended to be there So he sent the servant to the streets and lanes of the city to the highways and the hedges to find the poor and the crippled and the blind and the lame and they were the people who couldn't afford not to accept the invitation So, you may become aware at this point that your presence here is not because you were invited in the first place but you are invited on the basis of those who didn't come and now by the grace of God you and I have been invited They were people who could not afford to refuse such an invitation

They were the ones who would be overwhelmed by the variety and abundance of the banquet They would be grateful for a crust of bread yet find themselves confronted by the menu of the main dining room from the Vancouver Hotel They are people who having failed in the human struggle for place power and prestige find themselves in the place they could never deserve There are people like us who because of our intellectual understanding because of our social sophistication because of our prominence in the business life of the city because of the vast accumulation of personal wealth because of our ecclesiastical attainments cannot conceive of a social occasion at which we would not be totally welcome and not only would we be welcome but the occasion would be a disaster unless we came

[18 : 53] Those people didn't get to the banquet strangely enough and so the last verse of the parable says about those people none of those who were invited shall taste my banquet so in this in this circumstance we find ourselves who are humanly speaking looking for room at the top discovering that the welcome is to be made in the door at the bottom and that that's the difference between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of our God we who are destined for the top in our own imagination and the vanity of our own ego we who are destined for the top have to somehow come to the place where we can enter the door at the bottom well now in this book which I hope you will get out and turn to page and

I'll be with you in a minute in fact I want you to know that you too are invited to a banquet and I'm going to I'm going to embarrass Dan by getting him to stand up and read a passage to you from this

that will relate you to the banquet Dan would you would you read from page 91 at the bottom of the page there Dan didn't intend to do this I'm sure but I thought you would like to hear in the light of this parable I for my part shall be ready to celebrate the Holy Eucharist and according to mine office I call you on Christ's behalf to come to this heavenly feast it is an easy matter for a man to say I will not communicate because I am otherwise hindered with worldly business but such excuses are not so easily accepted before God if anyone say I am a grievous sinner and therefore I am afraid to come wherefore then do you not repent and amend for as the Son of God willingly yield up his soul by death upon the cross for your salvation so it is your duty to receive the communion in remembrance death as he himself commanded wherefore I bid you in God's name not to separate yourself from your brethren but to prepare yourselves and to come to feed upon the banquet of this most heavenly food so there is the invitation and that is the invitation which you all in the privacy of your own hearts must answer and you must examine your priorities whether you are able to answer this invitation or not I might commend to you that during the time it takes to receive communion that you read the other two exhortations which are found beginning on page 90 and that you end up not being one of those who when summoned to the banquet find they cannot come boys and girls let's sing that verse to them again so they can be reminded will you do that with me I cannot come to the banquet don't trouble me I have married a wife I have bought me a cow I have fields and commitment that cost a pretty sum pray have me excused I cannot come amen thank you