

“Committing to Christ”

By Tim Hall – 8 Nov 2020 (23 Pent A, Proper 27)
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[Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25; Psalm 78:1-7; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Matthew 20:1-13](#)

Let us pray... “May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.” Amen.

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A funny thing happened on the way to producing the church bulletin this week. Funny, as in interesting. At least I thought so. You see, I had reviewed the lectionary for the week and knew that the Gospel was **The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids**, which we just read. The bridesmaids ready themselves, with their lamps, to go meet the bridegroom and participate in the wedding banquet. Five are fully prepared with backup oil for their lamps, but five are not quite ready as they take no extra oil. More on the outcome later. But back to the funny thing.

As we prepare the bulletin for each service, many steps are involved. Charlene puts together a draft based on the type of service, Holy Eucharist of Morning Prayer, inserting the Diocesan and Anglican prayers for the week, choosing the cover art, and making other updates. Then she sends it out for other inputs and review. Josette chooses the music for the week, Lois provides updates for the announcements and calendar, Reverend Debbie, if she’s on for the week, reviews the liturgy, and I give the bulletin a look as well.

This week Charlene had found several potential covers for the bulletin and wondered if I had an opinion on which one I would like, since I was preaching today. Always happy to help, I set about looking at the three choices she had sent. The first I looked at was a wedding invitation, which at first glance looked like an interesting possibility. The invitation said, “The Heavenly Father requests the honor of your presence at the Wedding Banquet of his son, Jesus Christ, to the Church... The First Saturday of Eternity. Music begins at 5:30, dinner at 7. Resplendent Robe of Righteousness provided at the Cross. Response Required.” I thought, this is a nice twist for a bulletin cover. And even though our reading this morning had the bridegroom, Christ, coming at midnight, perhaps the invitation saying 7pm for the start of the banquet was just meant to indicate the waiting time the bridesmaids had to endure.



With that as a possibility, I thought I would look at the other two choices. On the cover itself she had one of those old mediaeval prints of folks gathered around a banquet table in the background, dining under a columned portico and watching the action taking place in the foreground, where a couple of



men dressed as guards are attending to another man lying on the ground. It's not exactly clear what is going on here. But there are definitely no bridesmaids anywhere to be seen. Hmm.

Well, I thought, I should look at the third choice. And here was a more modern drawing of another banquet table with guests toasting, a person with a crutch and a blind person with a cane, and someone looking like Jesus in the foreground giving a blessing. And in the background are a man and a woman, both naked if you can believe it, being expelled from



the feast, looking an awful lot like Adam and Eve being sent away from The Garden. Again, no bridesmaids.

What is going on here, I wondered. Do I have the wrong readings for today? I went back and checked the lectionary listed in the draft bulletin and the Joshua, Psalm, and 1st Thessalonians all matched up. But Matthew was listed as chapter 22, verses 1-13 instead of chapter 25. Well, when I checked to see what chapter 22, verses 1-13 was, I found that tells **The Parable of the Wedding Feast**. Amazing. This is the story where the King invites everyone to the wedding banquet but no one comes, because they are too busy or have other excuses. So he ends up inviting everyone from the streets and the banquet is filled. But when he finds someone not wearing the wedding robe, he has him bound and thrown into the outer darkness! Aha, I said, now I see what happened.

So that's the funny story. But where did all this leave me? I felt that this simple typo of putting a 22 for the Matthew chapter reference instead of a 25 was not really just a coincidence. It was interesting that it had led to another story about a wedding banquet. It caused me to reflect on how important this type of relationship is to our relationship with Christ. After all, Jesus' ministry really began at a wedding. After his baptism and spending 40 days in the wilderness tempted by, and overcoming, the devil, we find Jesus at the wedding at Kana, where, at the urging of his mother, Mary, he performs his first miracle by turning water into wine so the festivities can continue.

Today the bridesmaids come in anticipation of joining in this wonderful feast. But their lack of complete preparation, of not fully committing themselves to this relationship, causes them to miss out this grand banquet. It's the commitment that those we read about in Paul's letter to the Thessalonians have made. *"The Lord himself will descend from heaven and the dead in Christ will rise first."* What a wonderful reading this is, especially considering our All Saints' Day just past. These are the saints of God joining in the celebration, and they are not just the famous ones, they are the ones that are just like you and me, as it says in the hymn, *"They lived not only in ages past, there are hundreds of thousands still, the world is bright with the joyous saints who love to do Jesus' will."*

But why are some of the bridesmaids late in coming? Believe me, I know what it means to be late. I'm often just a bit behind, or often a lot behind. Sometimes it's a matter of where we set our priorities. But it is challenging. As Alfred P. Doolittle, the father of Eliza Doolittle, in *My Fair Lady* put it:

*I'm getting married in the morning! Ding dong! The bells are gonna chime.
Pull out the stopper! Let's have a whopper!
But get me to the church on time!*

*I gotta be there in the mornin', Spruced up and lookin' in me prime.
Girls, come and kiss me; Show how you'll miss me.
But get me to the church on time!*

*If I am dancin' - Roll up the floor.
If I am whistlin' - Swoosh me out the door!*

*For I'm gettin' married in the mornin'. Ding dong! the bells are gonna chime.
Kick up an rumpus. But don't lose your compass;
And get me to the church on time.*

There's a lot in this little ditty we can take away. The biggest is... don't get sidetracked. As long as we don't lose our compass, roll up the floor when we need to, get out the door and do the work of the kingdom, we may be rewarded by pulling out the stopper and having a whopper!

The Israelites committed themselves to the Lord at least three times as we saw in our reading from Joshua this morning. Joshua keeps asking them, "Are you sure? Because it's really important." And they avow that they are, over and over again, remembering the mighty works and the grace God has given them.

How are we committing ourselves to Christ, both as a church and as individuals? Are we ready to meet the call when the bridegroom comes? What should we be doing right now and as we live our lives to ensure that we are not late to the feast? Will we be caught up in the clouds together with that heavenly throng?

When we were baptized into Christ, we either affirmed for ourselves or were affirmed by others the lifelong commitment we entered into. Just as the Hebrews pledged themselves to the Lord, I want you to consider all the questions I've posed and the promises we've made as we stand and reaffirm ourselves through the renewal of our baptismal vows.

Please stand...

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