

Witnesses of the risen and ascended Christ, all things are now ready for the Great Banquet. Nothing is lacking. It has all been prepared. God the Father has made peace with us men. The Father has given His Son to us. Jesus has ushered in the age of life and salvation by His death and resurrection. And still He gives. Jesus keeps on giving. He gives His Holy Body and His Precious Blood, broken and shed on the cross, for us to eat and drink for the forgiveness of sins. All things are ready. There is nothing to add. God the Father has sacrificed His Son. It is finished. That is all we need. God the Father has removed His wrath from us. Now, for us, there is only grace, mercy and peace.

Yet still men make excuses. "I have to go see a piece of ground." "I have to test my oxen." "I just got married." The list of excuses of why we can't come here to the Great Banquet goes on and on. And I am not going to talk about excuses, I am tired of them. As one who has been sent to declare the invitation to you, I am tired of hearing the excuses. And since you are already here, you have heard the invitation and you have come; thanks be to God, you want to participate in the Great Banquet, you want to be fed by the hand of God, you have not made any excuses.

Those who make excuses are one thing, but that we don't puff ourselves up and think too good of ourselves compared to our neighbor; have we not sat in this very room and wished it were over already? Which of us has not been bored in church and daydreamed not just of lunch and appointments for the week, not just of fame and fortune and dreams come true, but sat in those very pews and dreamed of evil? Even plotted to sin? We've lusted and coveted, lied and blasphemed within sight of the altar, in the presence of God, while the Word of God was read and His great love proclaimed and offered. It is not just those who are

missing who are guilty. Excuses are cheap and plentiful. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Not one of us deserves to be here. Not one of us deserves to enjoy the Great Banquet.

But we are proud and arrogant men, we think that we can manipulate the generosity and patience of God. We think we can take advantage of and abuse God the Father's grace and good will. Who hasn't wanted the best of both worlds – the pleasures of the flesh, honor among men, luxuries, freedom, and constant amusement AND the joys and peace of heaven? Who is ready to lose his job, his family, his reputation, and his wealth for the Kingdom of God? We promised that on the day we were confirmed. Did we really mean it? Our debts are evidence that we do not like to wait. Do not think that we can enjoy the forbidden fruit now and grasp heaven for cheap when it is more convenient. Do not take the view that you can live for today, for tomorrow you die. Do not think you can just seize the day. The irony is that such vanity blinds us so we never realize how cheaply we have sold our souls.

Repent. Hear the warning. God says: "None of those who were invited shall taste of My Supper." God will not be mocked. Now is the hour of salvation. Tomorrow may never come. God is not fooled by our superficial acts and lip-service, by going through the motions. He is not impressed with our excuses. He desires mercy not sacrifice. He desires the circumcision of the heart. We need to stop playing games with our fate, planning to sin now and repent later. We need to stop posturing before men and spewing lies, pretending to be noble when we are not. We need to stop thinking that our sins are reasonable and bring no guilt to us or that we have some special relationship to God where He indulges our sins, considering them of little concern. Repent. We need to repent now. The criminal on the cross

next to Jesus is the only case of death-bed repentance in all of the Scriptures. So do not presume to think that we will have time to repent on our death bed, that opportunity might not come. The invitation to the Great Banquet is not for tomorrow. It is for today. It is right now. All things are ready. Do not take it for granted. Do not delay, delay not, o sinners draw near.

God the Father has done all things for you. Jesus has taken up your flesh, lived and suffered, died and rose for you. Jesus has endured Hell's fury and fire. Jesus has left the enemy, the devil, dead and bloody. Jesus has crushed the serpent's head and removed the chains of guilt and shame that held you. Jesus has flung open wide the gates of heaven and removed the guards. The flaming sword of Eden has been quenched in the Blood of the Lamb. The angel of death passes over. You are safe. There is no one to accuse you, no one to keep you out, nothing to stop you from this victory and joy given for free from on high. God Himself, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit loves you and beckons you to come to the feast. He wants you here.

Do not be afraid. Do not be sad. Do not think yourself unworthy or dwell upon your past sins. They are gone. They are forgiven. Come: weak and weary, heartbroken and lonely, trembling sinners wracked with guilt and uncertainty. All things are ready. Come to the feast. It has been made ready for you. The greatest and the least, the losers and the winners, the popular and unpopular, the failures and the disappointments, the wealthy and the poor, come. One and all, come to the Great Feast! Leave behind all earthly treasures. Get lost in the love of Christ that has loved you beyond all measure, that has forgiven every single flaw and sin and makes you new in Him. Lose yourself and find your life. Eat and drink without money or

cost. Be satisfied to the very depths of your soul and never thirst again. You belong to God. His Name is upon you. You are Baptized and He abides in you. You are His beloved son. The highways and hedges are not where you belong. You do not belong out there, that in not your home. The Father has brought you here this day to His House and to His Great Feast. Come. Be wrapped in perfect, selfless love. Eat His Body. Drink His Blood.

All things are ready. Nothing is lacking. He desires that you call upon Him and rest in Him. He wants you here. Whatever you've done, whatever evil things you've dreamed and thought, whatever lies you've told and slander in which you've engaged, no matter what, God has paid for it all in His Son. You are washed clean. You are like Lazarus in Abraham's bosom. You shall not be in want your cup runs over. Goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life. God the Father wants you to feast, to be washed clean and reunited again with Him in a close and personal relationship, to be full and satisfied with the Bread of Life, to be again at peace. He wants reconciliation and justification for you. What is God's is now yours. Come. All things are ready. He is waiting to give, that you would receive.

In ✠Jesus' name. Amen.

O merciful Father in heaven, on this anniversary of our nation's Declaration of Independence, keep this nation under Your care. Protect our land from danger and instability. Abide with our military who courageously keep our country safe. **[Especially Travis Folsom, Brian Lindner, Todd Essing, and Matthew Dietrich.]** Guide our president, our federal and state legislators, our governor, our county and city government officials. Grant all public servants the understanding that You work through them to keep our country stable and safe. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Eternal God, the country You have given to us is indeed a good land, a land in which freedom reigns. Give us faith, however, to look beyond this land and into the eternal home which You give to us for Jesus' sake. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of peace, You know that we live in a world plagued with war and uprising. By Your Word and Sacraments, strengthen our faith so that we can endure this world while remaining confident of Your eventual return, when war will cease and peace will sustain the new creation. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We rejoice, O Giver of every good thing, for the gift of marriage granted to Clayton and Tonya Reynolds. For the gift of a son, Calvin, to Tom and Sarah Hiler; keep him in Your grace until the day of His baptism. For another year of life granted to Libbie Lowry, Tony Moeller, Rick Jud, Marge Hepp, Maggie Armstrong, and Viola Bahls. Help us to remember that You alone richly and daily provide us with all that we need to support this body and life. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, look in mercy upon those who suffer with heavy burdens, burdens of guilt over what they've done or haven't done, or burdens of sickness or of any type of trial. Open their souls to hear and believe that You came to earth to give them rest from all burdens. **[Grant your rest especially to ...]** Give them the joy of knowing that despite their earthly problems, You continue to bless them with Your merciful presence and will at last bring them to the unspeakable joys of eternal life. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Comfort, O Lord, those who mourn the death of loved ones [especially _____]. In the midst of their weeping and grieving, remind them that You are the Resurrection and the Life and that whoever believes in You will live, even though he or she dies. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

O God, grant safety to all who travel for business or for pleasure during this holiday weekend; send your holy angels with them that they would be kept safe from all harm and danger. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**