

Isaiah 25: THE celebration

How much would you go through to make it to the party? Whatever party sounds most fun to you. A wedding of a family member or best friend – would you pay for a plane ticket and go through the hassle of going through the airport, flying, hotels, whatever, to be there for the party? Maybe it's a family reunion, would you drive hours and hours, with gas station food, and an aching back from sitting in the car all day and hotel mattresses. Would you go through all that to be there? Maybe it's a get together with old friends that you've been waiting for and you spend a lil extra at the restaurants and golf course to have a good time with them. The point is, we often make sacrifices, we often go through a whole lot of money and trouble to get to big meaningful celebrations and reunions.

Well our Old Testament lesson tells us about a party. The best party. God's party. That's right, we often think that heaven and the new creation is some eternal Church service where we will be bored out of our minds. That's only half true, it IS an eternal Church service in that we will be constantly and always praising and thanking God and being served by Him, but it won't be boring, no, no, it will be a celebration, a party.

Look at what Isaiah tells us about it: it will be high on a mountain, imagine the views at that scenic location, at God's place on high. And there is food, real food, that our taste buds will taste - we won't be ghosts we will be raised up. There will be drinking, but it won't cause the addiction or sin or sickness it does now, only joy. There will be music and songs and good hymns of praise and dancing. And it will be a reunion with all those in Christ. The ultimate party, the ultimate reunion, put on by the host who is good and we will revel in that. We will revel in all that is good.

And there will be no shadow hanging over that party. I perused a "Psychology Today" article that described how many people are afraid of being happy. Whether because they think Karma will be against them now that they have had joy, or because they know that the joy, at some point, will have to end. Like when you turn on the radio to your favorite song and it's already half over. Ah! Sometimes you wish you hadn't heard it at all. We spend so much time dreading that our joy will end, we don't enjoy the joy itself. And so each celebration we go to must end. Each gathering has its goodbyes. Each life, the same. And we all know this, it's in the back of our minds as we wonder if we will ever see them again. It robs our joy.

But not at this party! For at this party we celebrate the defeat of death. As we feast on food, God will feast on death, putting an end to it, yes, at God's party, death is the piñata. It is destroyed- to Him and His people's great joy. No sickness, pain, or farewell will end our celebration in God's Kingdom.

Would you buy a plane ticket for that party? Would you spend a little money? Would you get up early once in a while for it? The beauty of course, that we ought remember every day, is that we don't have to do anything to get to the party, the Lord, as we see in our Gospel reading has freely sent even us sinners, invitations, and he has worked through the Holy Spirit to bring us to faith so that we might have garments cleansed by the blood of Christ so we can trust that we will indeed be at that party.

No we don't have to work to get to it, but we have to wait for it. And that isn't easy. In the age of technology, cell phones, and internet, we don't like waiting. And the Church has been waiting for 2k years, what's taking so long, God? Why must we wait here with pain, sickness, and death? Well, it's because God is saving more. Yes, even as the Church grows smaller here, it grows elsewhere, and even if the people aren't flooding in in our lands the Word of God is still preached and the Holy Spirit is still bringing more people to faith – this battle is not in vain. I guess

to put it another way: Why are we waiting? Because God still wants to invite more people to his party. So we wait until all the invitations are out.

And while we wait, there will be tears as we say our goodbyes, whether from moving away, or as we shed tears saying goodbyes at funerals. There will be reproach as the world calls us hateful and dumb for believing in our Savior. We will have many battles to fight with our own sins and addictions, we will have nights of doubt, and we will have stress and fears and sickness and pain. Trust me, I know, the waiting isn't always fun.

And our Lord knows that too. It's why the author of Hebrews writes, "looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." You see that, Jesus knew he was going to beat death, he knew he was going to rise and be vindicated. But he had to wait, he had a mission to accomplish, and battles to fight, in order that we might be let into the feast, the celebration, with him. And so before he rose, he was ridiculed, betrayed, beaten, and tortured on a cross. He endured suffering for the Glory to come, not just for Him, not just because he knew he would sit at the right hand of God, he was at the right hand from all eternity, he didn't have to die to earn that. He died so that he

might be raised up, and that we might be raised up with him. That is the joy set before him. That you would be forgiven and have life with him. That's what gives Him and the angels joy, that's what gives them reason to celebrate. And one day, on the last day, when all God's people are gathered, when all the invitations returned, when all our garments are cleansed by his blood, you better believe there will be a party. So let's wait, like our Lord did, it will be worth it.

Paul in our epistle lesson picks up on this. He is in jail, he might get his head chopped off for all he knows, but what does he say, "don't be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." He might die and he's saying don't worry? Is he crazy? No, he just knows His Savior won him a spot at the party, so he isn't worried. And he tells us, that as we wait through the ups and downs of life, he tells us to focus on what is good and godly and to be content. If things are going well in your life, if it feels like a constant party, great, but don't let it distract you from the reality that the best party is yet to come. If things are terrible, remember, you are invited and will be brought to a celebration and all the waiting and travel pains, will be worth it. "Behold, this is our God, we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord, we have waited for him, let us be glad and rejoice in his

salvation.” On that day, we will be saying, “Man, all that hardship and pain – it was worth it.”

So let's stand fast in the faith. Let's keep strengthening our faith with God's Word, with his foretaste, his appetizers, of the final feast he offers us here. Let's build a foundation on God's Word that cannot be shaken, so when the bad days come we can stand firm knowing that no layovers, no hidden fees, no roadblocks or flat tires, and no sickness, pain, terror, or death, will stop us from being at the party. Because God has invited us and he will see us all safely there. Even if our paths diverge for now, we will all be there. In the name of Jesus. Amen.