

"Appetizers For The Feast"
Revelation 5:1-14

May 5,2019

3rd Sunday of Easter – Confirmation Day

Well, Sami, here we are – Confirmation Day. It is a day which you have been preparing for almost your entire life – from the day of your baptism as a baby up until this day. This preparation culminated in 2 years of intensive study of the chief teachings of the Word of God as explained to us by the Small Catechism of Doctor Martin Luther. You've done well in your studying of the Word of God. You've been faithful in memorizing the chief parts of the Christian faith. You've been diligent in serving as an acolyte here in church. You've done so well that, as far as 2019 goes, you are in a class by yourself.

This day is to be a great spiritual celebration for you. Today, by the instruction and the power of the Holy Spirit, you will renounce the devil and all of his wicked ways by which he hopes to destroy you. You will confess for yourself the faith into which you were baptized and which was confessed for you by your sponsors on your baptism day. And you will vow, by the grace of God, to continue in the faith which you confess today, to hear the Word of God and receive the Lord's Supper faithfully, and to live according to the Word of God.

That's the spiritual celebration. But there's more. Don't think that, just because I'm a pastor, I don't know what it is. Nearly 50 years ago, I sat where you are sitting today, waiting to be confirmed. And I was thinking what I know you're thinking about now. I was not thinking just of the great spiritual blessings and activities associated with this church service. Oh, no! I was thinking about... the party! I was thinking about the big dinner to be given in my honor at our house. I was thinking about all of the relatives who would come to celebrate with me on that day. And I was thinking about the gifts – the Confirmation Day gifts – which would soon be mine. Now, I attended a Lutheran school. I remember going to school the day after Confirmation Day and the topic of conversation was, "Well, how much did you get?" "I got \$100." "I got \$200." "What did you get?" If there is anyone here who is so pious that he or she never had these thoughts or never had these conversations, I'd like to hear your story.

Although we have had such thoughts and conversations, we may be a bit embarrassed to admit that because it almost seems sacrilegious to speak of partying and getting stuff – gifts – at a church activity. We think the church should be more like, well, church. That conjures up in the minds of many solemn, boring, and non-celebratory activities. We may think on confirmation day that we want to get through the "church stuff" so that we can get on to the party and the gifts. Would you be surprised to hear me say that I want to get on to the party and the gifts, as well? Would you be further surprised to hear me say that this is what our Christian faith is all about?

Our text for today from Revelation, the very last book in the Bible, describes such a party going on in heaven. And what a wonderful celebration it is! John saw God Himself seated on a throne in the center of heaven. Near the throne is the Lamb, Jesus Christ. Twenty-four elders, representing the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles –

that is, all of God's people from the Old and New Testaments – sitting on twenty-four thrones surrounding God's throne and worshiped Him. Four living creatures, probably cherubim, are around the throne worshiping God. Thousands upon thousands of angels surround them as well. And all are singing and praising God and the Lamb.

What a party that is! It's better than any confirmation day party ever! Any of us would love to be at such a party. However, suppose we couldn't attend such a party. Suppose we were considered not "good enough" to be invited to such a party. Sami, suppose a great confirmation party was planned by your parents for you and then you found out you were being confirmed because you hadn't done everything necessary. (Oh, by the way, I haven't returned your final test.) That would be very difficult to accept and sad to experience.

But that's exactly like the party going on in our text. None of us are worthy to be in attendance at such a party. All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Heaven is a holy and perfect place. By our sin we have disqualified ourselves from being in attendance there. God's holy angels and His holy people, the saints, are there, but what about us?

As Sami can tell you, two of the most important things we learned in confirmation class are who God is and who we are. God is holy and perfect. We are sinful and imperfect. Since the time that Adam and Eve fell into sin, we have inherited their sin so that we are sinful by nature. Because of that sinful nature, we commit acts of sin. We so often do the wrong which God forbids in the 10 Commandments which we studied. And we fail so often to do the good which God commands us to do in those same 10 Commandments. We are not worthy in any way to be invited or to attend the greatest party of all, the one described in this text.

So, what do we do? Are we doomed to miss this most wonderful celebration and only read about it in the book of Revelation? No. While we are not worthy to attend a heavenly worship on our own merits, there is Someone who is worthy to attend the heavenly celebration. In fact, He is the one who is giving the party – the Lamb, Jesus. Our text says, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

Why does the Bible call Jesus "the Lamb"? Remember what Jewish people used lambs for. They chose perfect lambs without spot or blemish, killed these lambs, and offered them to God for the forgiveness of their sins. John the Baptist referred to Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." He is perfect without spot or defect and yet was slain. He offered His life as a sacrifice and substitute for our sinful lives to gain forgiveness of all sins of all people. God accepted His life as a worthy sacrifice for us.

Now, He who is worthy – Jesus – now makes you worthy as well. He is worthy to take the scroll of salvation, open its seals, and bring that salvation to all people. His death means that God takes away your sin. By the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God, He helps you to see your sin, confess that sin, and repent of that sin. He takes that sin away and declares you to be holy and pure. In your baptism, He gives you a new heart and a new attitude to love and obey Him. He lives in you and

through you to be obedient to God. His actions make you worthy to stand before Him in the heavenly congregation for the great celebration.

What a day that will be! Sami, if you think that the celebration which will occur after the confirmation service is going to be great, it's nothing in comparison with this celebration described for us in our text. This is going to be the party to end all parties and the celebration to end all celebrations. Most importantly, our Lord Jesus Christ will be there. All of God's people from the Old and New Testaments will be there. All of our family members and friends who have died in the faith, trusting the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness and salvation will be there at this party. And there we will receive the most precious gift of all – not money, not clothes, not anything of this earthly life. We shall receive eternal life.

But what about now? Our celebrations here and now usually don't last very long and are very limited compared with this heavenly feast. Plus, we live in a world still affected by the consequences of sin and evil. It's often so hard to even think about celebrating. Every day, it seems that we read about dying due to extreme weather: tornadoes, floods, earthquakes, and so on. Every day, it seems that somebody gathers a bunch of weapons together and shoots up a school, a marketplace, a church, and so on. We all experience our own little part of suffering. We lose loved ones to death. We may experience financial need, health issues, and, in growing old, we see the grave looming on the horizon, waiting for each one of us.

But the Lamb who was slain has been raised to life again. And we who have been justified by faith, instructed in the faith, confessed the faith, and lived by that faith, shall be raised to life again and invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb and brought there by His holy angels. As bad as life gets at times, don't you sometimes feel that you are spiritually starving and just want to get to the celebration, to the party, to the feast? Do you hunger for that?

What can you do until then? When you go to a nice restaurant to eat a sumptuous dinner, but find that it's going to be a while before that dinner is ready, what you do? You order appetizers. I remember when I was a kid thinking that appetizers seemed like a pretty stupid thing. Did you really need something to whet your appetite? Didn't you come to the restaurant because you were already hungry? Then I learned that appetizers are not supposed to make you hungry, but tide you over, satisfy your hunger, until the main dinner was ready.

That's what we have right here and now. God not only forgives us and saves us by the blood of the Lamb so that we might feast with him in Paradise, but He also provides us with appetizers to satisfy us now until we enter that feast in heaven. That's why we sing, as part of our liturgy, "This is the feast of victory for our God." This feast is already going on in heaven as this song of praise describes using the words of our text. But it is also, to a lesser extent going on for us here on earth at His altar. Here, we receive appetizers for the feast to come to whet our appetite and tide us over until we enter that.

We have His presence among us as He is promised to be where two or three gathered together in His name. We have His Word, printed in a book, the Holy Bible. We have His message, spoken through the pastor, where He condemns our sin and

calls us to repentance; where He forgives our sin and frees us from all guilt; and in which He encourages us to live holy lives and live according to His will.

We have Himself – His body and blood are here – on our altar in and with the bread and the wine for us to eat and drink and so receive God’s forgiveness and peace in the most intimate and personal way with brothers and sisters in Christ with whom we share a common confession of the faith.

We have His Holy Spirit present and working among us through His Word and Sacrament to enable us to believe this, to receive His forgiveness, to enjoy His peace, and to experience here in our sanctuary what is being described in our text. For the feast here in our sanctuary is but a foretaste of the feast already going on in heaven.

The people of God from all time and space are celebrating with us. Here, at our altar, heaven touches earth. Remember how we say in the liturgy, “Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify your glorious name...” You not only receive this foretaste with those who are present visibly, but also with those who have gone before you – grandma’s, grandfathers, fathers, mothers, friends, brothers and sisters in Christ.”

This gives us a whole new perspective on coming to church. Many people think we attend church because we have to, to impress God, or to fulfill a religious ritual like confirmation, thus “graduating” from church. It’s nothing of the sort. We come to church because we want to, not because we are forced; to receive, not to give; and to experience, not to just sit.

The collect (short prayer) after our celebration of Holy Communion is not only an appropriate way to close our service, but is also an appropriate summation of our lives as Christians. It says, “Gracious God, our heavenly Father, You have given us a foretaste of the feast to come in the Holy Supper of Your Son’s body and blood. Keep us firm in the true faith throughout our days of pilgrimage that, on the day of His coming, we may together with all your saints, celebrate the marriage feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom which has no end.” Sami, enjoy your Confirmation Day, even the party and the gifts. Even though it may seem to be unspiritual, it is a picture of what we all are looking to – the great feast of heaven and the gifts we receive there. Continue to enjoy the appetizers here to strengthen, nourish, and guide you until we all arrive in the one party lasts forever. Amen.