

Trinity 20 (St. Luke's Day) (2026)

I want to speak to you this morning on the Gospel you have just heard read, but before I do I need to mention that today, Oct. 18, is St. Luke's Day. And this seems a good occasion to share how St. Luke's got its name.

The first service was held on June 7, 1987, in the community room of the old Blue Ridge City Hall. At that time, no name had been chosen for the new congregation. Flyers placed on shop windows simply read "Episcopal services beginning."

But it did not take long before one founding member, a woman by the name of Ardel Perryman, proposed, St. Luke's.

The reason she was attracted to Luke was because of his association with healing. In Colossians 4:14, he is called the "beloved physician".

By way of background, not long before moving to Blue Ridge from Ocala, Fla., Ardel and her husband Art had lost a child. So understandably healing was very much on their minds and hearts.

Other members of the no-name congregation had no preference. So, St. Luke's it was!

As a result, bringing the love and healing power of God to North Georgia became the goal and aim of this congregation. It remains so today.

So, now you know why St. Luke's is St. Luke's!

Now onto this morning's Gospel. Here we find Jesus telling a parable about some people receiving an invitation to the party of a lifetime. But when the time came for the party to begin and the host sent out messengers saying, come . . . no one bulged.

But it gets worse. When a second group of messengers were sent out, these were shamelessly ridiculed and abused.

So, what is this parable about? Is Jesus giving a lesson in etiquette . . . what not to do when you receive an invitation to a party?

No, it was directed at his fellow countrymen who were failing to get onboard with His kingdom agenda.

The party in this parable is the messianic banquet, that great feast that was to take place when Yahweh showed up in the person of the Messiah. Speaking of it 700 years earlier, Isaiah had written:

“And in this mountain [Jerusalem] shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.”

In case you are not up on your “wines on the lees”, this expression refers to the best wines, that which has risen above the dregs at the bottom of the vat.

Moreover, the invitation to this party was by invitation only. It was for God’s covenant people.

Every Jew wanted to be present at this great feast, at least that is what they said with their lips. But, if you look back over their history, another story is told.

Time after time they – especially their leaders -- had acted very rudely to those sent by God to get them ready for this event, namely the prophets. Some they had ridiculed. Others, they had shut up in prison. Still others they had killed.

Now the religious leaders in Jesus’ own day were going down the same road as their

forebearers. They were plotting to kill the one God had sent. The only thing being different was that Jesus was more than a prophet. He was God's Son.

This parable paints a picture of calamity. Their place at the Messianic banquet will be taken by others, people they considered outcasts and nobodies . . . tax collectors, former prostitutes and Samaritans.

Further still, people not of the family of Abraham – the gentiles -- will come and share in this meal. John in the Prologue to his Gospel speaks of this great reversal of fortune when he writes:

“He [Jesus] came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”

So, the message of the main portion of this parable is that unbelief and rejection of Jesus brings loss and judgment.

But what about the man at the end who goes to the banquet without a wedding garment, who goes on his own terms? Whom does He represent?

I think it is fair to say he represents those Jews who were relying on their own status as members of Abraham's physical family and on their own law-keeping to win them a seat at this event. They are the self-righteous who think they need no repentance.

Well, that is a thumbnail view of this parable's original context, but how might it apply to us in the 21st century?

Let's begin with some Good News. The invitation list has been expanded to include all and sundry, yes, you and me. The only

requirement is a willingness to come. “Come, every soul by sin oppressed. There is mercy with the Lord.” No outcasts!

Beyond that, we learn from this parable that Christianity is not a joyless, pleasure-denying religion. Jesus summons us to a feast, not a wake!

William Barclay, the Scottish Bible commentator of the last century, writes:

“To think of Christianity as a gloomy giving up of everything which brings laughter and sunshine and happy fellowship is to mistake its whole nature. It is to Joy that the Christian is invited; and it is joy he misses, if he refuses the invitation.”

Christianity does beckon us to die. . . to die to one way of thinking and doing, to make sacrifices, to spend and be spent in the service

of others. Yet, beyond the darkness of Good Friday comes the blaze of Easter.

Because of Easter we can live free . . . free from the fear of death, free from a life of purposelessness, free to enjoy all that is winsome and wonderful in this present world.

All that is true, honorable and lovely in this present age points forward to something better in the age to come.

Christianity is a creation-affirming religion. “This is my Father’s world” says one of our hymns.

Good news, but we also find in this parable a warning: **It is possible to miss the party.**

What we do in this life, in particular what we do with Jesus, counts.

The responses people give to the call of the Gospel can be summarized under three headings.

The first is **Light-hearted Indifference**. Some in this parable made light of the King's invitation. They were too busy to break away.

Isn't that the way it is with many in our world today? This world is too much with them. They fail to see that we live in a rented field and that the stuff we amass and hold onto will one day end up in an estate sale or a dumpster. Their approach to life is wholly this-worldly.

Stuff needs to be put in its proper place. Use it, enjoy it, but don't make a god out of it. Seek first the kingdom of God.

A second response is **Active Opposition**. In verse 6, we read: "**The rest seized the king's servants, treated them shamefully, and killed**

them.” Murderous hate is still very much with us.

There are many places in the world today where professing Christian faith is dangerous and even deadly.

A few years ago I attended Evensong at the chapel of Lincoln College in Oxford. It was the “leavers” service . . . that is, a service where those graduating and going on to their next endeavor were being recognized.

During the service, one of the ‘leavers’, a member of the choir, was baptized and confirmed. He was from Pakistan and came from a Muslim background.

It was very powerful hearing this young man confess Christ crucified and promising to fight manfully under His banner against sin, the world and the devil . . . and doing so before all his mates.

In fact, I found what I witnessed so moving that, after returning home, I wrote it up in one of my newspaper columns.

Almost as an afterthought, I emailed the draft of this column to the college chaplain, who almost immediately emailed back asking me not to use this young man's name. He explained that in his culture, leaving Islam meant, at least potentially, expulsion from his family and in some cases death. **Murderous hate of Christ and the Gospel is still with us.**

So far, we have looked at two responses to the Gospel -- Lighthearted Indifference and Active Opposition. But there is a third, **Grateful Acceptance.**

In the end, the King's banqueting chamber was filled with people of all sorts. What a wonderful thought. It doesn't matter how checkered your past. It doesn't matter how much money is in your bank account, who your

granddaddy was or is, your level of education or mental capacity.

All may come to the King's banquet. Jesus has paid the price of sin, taken upon Himself the penalty you and I deserve. A sign has gone up over heaven's gate saying, "Enter in!"

. . . which brings me back to the mission of this church dedicated to the beloved physician.

That mission, as I have already said, is to bring the love and healing power of God to North Georgia (and now, because of the internet, to the whole world). It is to rescue the perishing, care for the dying.

Let's renew our commitment to this mission and go out and be worthy of the name chosen for this church 39 years ago.