

In Nomine Iesu

The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity Matthew 22:1-14 – In baptism we are dressed for the occasion

And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: “The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.”’ But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. When the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.’ So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who is our righteousness. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

“Clothes make the man,” is an old saying. Bankers used to dress conservatively, and many still do, white shirt, inconspicuous tie, dark suit. The logic was that a conservatively dressed man (or woman) is more likely to be conservative with – **and of!** - my money, and attentive to my property. On the other hand, a mechanic dresses differently for his vocation. If an auto mechanic dressed like a banker, his customers would probably question whether he knew what he was doing!

Suits and ties used to be reserved for Sunday mornings. With many men, this is still the case, although it seems fewer and fewer men dress for church in suit and tie. It used to be standard. One’s best clothing was reserved for church on Sunday. Similarly, people also used to dress in their very best when they attended weddings and funerals. This practice reflected something about the importance of the events themselves and the respect people had for the institutions of marriage and church, and the sanctity of life, which God alone both gives and takes.

I

The parable of the wedding banquet makes just that point: the *occasion* determines the manner of dress. In the case of a banker or mechanic, the duties of his calling determine his dress at work, but both might dress similarly as they enter the house of God. In the parable the occasion is a wedding banquet for the king’s son. The proper dress for the feast is a “wedding garment.” Street or work clothes are not acceptable. Jesus doesn’t tell us what the wedding garment looked like, simply that

it was required for the wedding feast. What it looked like is **not** important to the meaning of the parable. What is important is the **necessity** of wearing a wedding garment. Without it a guest would be left outside in the darkness.

Jesus spoke this parable to a crowd gathered in the temple courts a few days before His crucifixion. It is the **final parable** He spoke in the last, great public gathering before His trial, suffering, crucifixion, and death. The previous parables of His last days were directed at the chief priests and the Pharisees, and at all who believed as they did. But now He spoke to all. He spoke a parable of warning that cautions the believer and unbeliever alike to heed the invitation to the wedding **and** be properly dressed for the banquet in honor of the King's Son and His bride.

The details of the parable paint a picture for our eyes, a picture that agrees with all the words Jesus had already spoken to our ears. His parable pictures spiritual truth clothed in earthly garments, so that we might understand. With this parable Jesus confronted His people Israel publicly for the last time in His earthly ministry, right in the temple courts of Jerusalem. Matthew recorded it for us, so that Christ might confront us also in these last days, asking each of us here today, "Will you come to the banquet of the King in the wedding garment He provides for you to wear?"

What does it mean to be properly dressed? The occasion is a wedding banquet that will be marked by confrontation, confrontation with God. The outcome depends entirely on whether we are found to be properly dressed or not. "For many are called, but few are chosen," He says. Are we among the few? Or will we find ourselves without a wedding garment? How are we to avoid being cast into outer darkness, where there is everlasting anguish, weeping, and gnashing of teeth?

Just as the King of the parable provided everything needful for the banquet, God had provided everything for His chosen people Israel. The banquet preparations represent all God had done and was doing on behalf of Israel. In His grace God saw that man was lost in corruption, and unable to appear before Him clothed in anything but the filthy rags of his evil deeds, words, and thoughts. So He sent His own Son into the world to take away man's sin. He sent His Son to do everything necessary to bring man into the presence of God, the King. But the stubbornness of man's heart knows no gratitude. So "they paid no attention and went off – one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them." Israel, led by its religious leaders, chose to spurn God's invitation.

The king sent His servants to those who had been invited to tell them the banquet was ready. Israel received the invitation through the prophets. Their pleading with Israel to repent and believe in the coming Savior is recorded in the Old Testament. What is more, just as God called Israel through the prophets, so does He continue to call us by the preachers and teachers of the New Testament, He calls us to repent of our sins and believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior! The Apostle John writes that his Gospel was "...written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31).

II

Now we come to the matter of **greatest** importance - the wedding garment. Many speculate that the wedding garment of the parable represent our good works. If we

fail to do good works, they say, we shall be thrown out of God's kingdom into the eternal darkness of damnation. It is true that good works are the fruit of a living faith in Jesus Christ. It is also true that good works are necessary. But good works cannot undo the evil we have already done. Our sins offend God and harm the lives and souls of real people. How can any amount of good works raise to life one who has been killed? How can our being faithful in marriage now undo unfaithfulness committed in the past? How can perfect honesty now erase the dishonest words of earlier days? How can our kind and loving words of the present take away the deep wounds we have inflicted with our tongues on the hearts and minds of others in the past? If the wedding garment we plan to wear at King's banquet, that is, on the day of judgment, is woven out of our good works, it will not pass inspection. In fact, it will be as Isaiah said, "all our righteous deeds are as filthy rags." (Isaiah 64:6) We will not be dressed for the occasion. We will find ourselves in darkness – forever.

Dear friends, we are not saved by our works but by God's works. We are not saved by asking, "What would Jesus do?" No, we are saved by what He **has done**. That is why the banquet of the King is given in His Son's honor. It is for Jesus' sake that the invitation has gone out. The wedding garment each wears at the feast is woven out of His righteousness, not yours, not mine. Simply put, it is as St. Paul writes "For by grace you are saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Christ died on the cross of Calvary, carrying our sins, so that they might be paid for in full. Every day of His life before, every step of His earthly ministry toward Calvary, He lived as we never have, pleasing His Father, the King, in all things, so that His life might be counted as ours, just as His death is counted as ours. All this is given to us complete and perfect in our baptism. God has **given** it to us **freely**, for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ. And with it He gave us another gift, faith. He gave us faith to believe what we cannot see, that though our sins be as scarlet, He has made them whiter than snow.

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Dear fellow invitees, we come to this place because here we are welcomed by the King. Here He speaks forgiveness, telling us not to fear but to believe. He tells us a great banquet is coming, to which we are invited. He has prepared all things, right down to our attire for event, which is the garment of righteousness with which He clothed us at our baptism. That's why we come here, we who have sinned and done evil this week. We come to confess, "Great King of grace, who so loved the world that You gave Your only begotten Son to live and die for us, forgive us our sins. Turn our eyes from the evil we have said and done against You and our neighbor. Turn our eyes to Your Son who indeed is the Life of the party You have invited us to, the great wedding feast in heaven that will have no end. He is our life and our salvation. We are clothed with His righteousness. Open our eyes to see that in our baptism You have clothed us with His righteousness. Open the eyes of our faith to see that all things are indeed ready, even as You have promised. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria