

Pentecost 19 Dressed for the Party Matt 22 2 Oct 11 2020

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing unto You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen!

Dressed for the party! Sounds rather innocuous, doesn't it? Will we be dressed for the party? This parable ends with a strange and seemingly uncharitable scene. The king encounters a guest who is not wearing his wedding garment. He deals harshly with him, cast him out into the outer darkness.

The story begins with a party. The king is celebrating the wedding of his son. This is, in a sense, a picture of heaven. Heaven is more than pearly gates, golden roads, fluffy-cloud front yards and glistening white marble buildings. Heaven is a celebration. We look forward to an eternal celebration of life and grace when we die, but we are also invited to celebrate life and grace, now.

Over and over again, the Scriptures exhort the people to celebrate. We are to praise the Lord, give thanks, and worship God's love, grace and presence in our lives. We may not be able to dance our way through life, but we can live each day grateful for God's gifts and celebrating the gift of life.

When the king's invitation to the celebration is refused by some, the king expands the invitation to celebrate to everyone both good and bad. No one needs to be excluded from a life of gratitude and celebration. Even when shamed by our rejection, God still invites us even more. Paul writes in his letter to Romans, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

One thing **is** frightening in this parable. It is not the wrath of the king, but the power of his subjects—humans. The king will not force anyone to His wedding banquet. Humankind has the power to refuse. We struggle with apathy and a Christianity which often sees the Gospel as a license to do very little.

The garment had been given to us. But many times we may be the Christian who has been received into Christ through Baptism, but by looking at us, someone might never know it. It is true, we are not saved by what we do. Nevertheless, what Christ does, should and indeed must have an effect in our lives.

Sanctification is not an option for Christians. Neither is it some currency by which we buy heaven. But it is what Christ has given us and what the Spirit works in us. If we would deny it, we effectively have taken off the garment which Christ has given us and with which He has dressed us.

I read this parable and I reflect on the many times that I refuse God's invitations to celebrate and live my life in gratitude. Perhaps you might be a little like me.

- There are those times when my world is coming apart. I am overwhelmed with worry and concern. God whispers in my ear, "Relax, I've got you covered." The Lord invites me to let go of my anxiety and to replace it with peace, joy and celebration. So often I refuse that invitation.
- Occasionally, I get caught up with time. There just doesn't seem to be enough of it. I feel driven by time. I'm always in a rush. I'm destination orientated—not caring as much about the journey, but just getting to the destination as quickly as possible. God comes, at these hectic moments, and invites me to slow down and celebrate life. The Lord reminds me that even Jesus separated himself from the crowd and went away to rest and to pray. Usually I'm moving too fast and can't put on the brakes hard enough to accept his invitation.
- When I am hurt and offended, I'm tempted to hold grudges, withhold my forgiveness, and limit my love. Again, the Lord comes to me and invites me to let go, forgive, and celebrate his gifts of love, and unlimited forgiveness and grace that He bestows on me.

Being a disciple of Jesus Christ is more than baptism, or receiving Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Discipleship also involves saying, "Yes," to God's invitation to celebrate.

The king may have responded aggressively to his subjects who sought to insult him. But, the King of kings and Lord of lords acts graciously toward us. God continually invites us to participate in the feast and to celebrate. All we need to do is to accept God's invitation. By our rejection we have rejected the king. We want the feast on our own terms, not on the king's terms. It is as if we are saying "my shirt is good enough" when in fact it is not good enough.

Only the garment the king provides is enough. The king is enraged and orders him cast out into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

In today's world, it would be like entering the military and insisting upon wearing the nice shirt your mom sent with you to boot camp. The Sergeant is probably not going to go for that. Or it would be like going jacketless to a restaurant that requires a jacket for men. Then, when they offer one of extra coats they keep in the coat room, refusing the offer and trying to go in anyway.

The King is not a fellow to be trifled with. The first invitees are destroyed. The guy who rejects the garment is thrown out into the outer darkness. If we have a picture of God who indulges every sinner and never actually condemns anyone, we have a very different picture of God than Jesus does. This King has a righteous anger! If you don't believe this, just try and live without him. Death is waiting for all of us. Consider the OT lesson and the "veil which covers all the nations." There is a "dress" of sorts with which the world will cover us: It's called Death. The day will come when our life slips between our fingers and we cannot hold onto it. We will be helpless before it. God doesn't **have** to help us.

As a result, we exhort our people to wear that party dress, live this life which Christ has given us. It does not buy us entrance to the party. Jesus bought that. But it is just plain rude and ungrateful of us to live a life which has no Christianity to it, a life which has no cross to mark it. We are God's people – created in Christ Jesus to do the good works which God has established for us (Eph 2:10).

The wedding garment was a gift from the host to the guest. The guest, however, had refused to be clad in this festive garment. Now the king's anger seems a little more reasonable. He was not discriminating against some poor sap whose clothing budget was too small to afford proper clothes. This man was stubbornly insisting that **his** clothes were good enough, better than what the king might give. We do the same when we tell Christ, or behave as if we know how to live our lives and that He can butt out of our Monday world. When Christ's gift of forgiveness does not solve all our problems with one another, when we let the world define success for us and chart our course, at those times we are not listening to Christ.

The first Christians called themselves followers of “The Way.” It was a way which they followed, not a state of being, but a path upon which their life was charted and which they pursued. And if you take the parable to its conclusion, that this king is God and the robe is nothing less than the righteousness won at the cost of his only Son’s death upon a cross, the consequences become even more reasonable.

Today, God proclaims a gift to you, a gift freely given in your Baptism and which you have not deserved, a gift which is renewed every time you kneel at this rail and partake of this feast. God has already clothed you with this garment. He first sized you and clothed you on the day of your Baptism. That is why we often dress those babies in a white dress. That is why some of us wore a white confirmation robe when we were confirmed. That is why when we are buried, our casket might be draped with a white funeral pall or our urn covered by a white urn pall. These traditions of Christianity remind us that, from Baptism to grave, God is covering us with His righteousness, the right-ness, of Jesus. You are dressed for the party.

We come to this altar this morning for a foretaste of the feast to come, with our shoes polished and clothed in the righteousness of Christ. The Lord’s Supper is not a solemn moment. We say “Lift up your hearts! We lift them to the Lord!” at the preface – that is rejoicing. Let us rejoice and be glad in the foretaste of the feast to come, the rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well-refined, through which God will swallow up the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever.

May we rejoice in the gracious gift of God to us in Christ Jesus – and live our daily lives in the righteousness with which he has dressed each of us.

And may the love of God and the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit abide with you to life everlasting. Amen!