

## “The Clothes Make the Man” Matthew 22.1-14 Trinity 20 2024

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I suspect you've heard the saying “The clothes make the man.” And as much as we'd like to deny it, we all live by it. We all have our personal dress codes—what's appropriate at home and what's appropriate in public. We have a dress code for going to see the symphony or theatre or other “classy” events, to make sure we all look like the people we think we are. There's a dress code for lawyers and judges, so they look neat and professional. There is a dress code for hospitals, so that workers and patients are protected. As a pastor obviously I follow a dress code, so people know who the pastor is (in fact the pastor's clothing is far more complicated and also tells you the church season, whether this is the lead pastor or not, and if there is communion). If you don't think you have a dress code, answer this - How many of you looked at yourself in the mirror before you came to service today? Most of you, I'm guessing.

All of us care about the clothes we wear, because our clothes say something about who we are. Too often though, we care too much about the clothes we wear and we care way too much about the clothes other folks are wearing. When we judge others and make assumptions about them based on their outward appearance like this, we sin.

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St. James says, "My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?"

To judge any man or woman or even us by the clothes we wear is to sin. Today, the Holy Spirit calls us to repent of that sin and to reconsider how we think of what we wear and what others wear. That doesn't mean, though that what you wear doesn't matter. It does matter. It matters to God. But the clothes God cares about are not the clothes you put on this morning. God doesn't care the slightest bit about what you're wearing now or what you might wear anytime later.

In the parable Jesus tells in the gospel, the King says to the guest who came into the wedding feast without a wedding garment, '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.'

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Let's map out the parable for clarity: The King is God the Father. The King's son is Christ. The Wedding feast is the Church, even heaven itself. The wedding garment is the righteousness of faith for all who believe.

The only clothes that matter to God are the robes of righteousness and the garments of salvation. This—and only this—is the wedding garment that gets you into the great marriage feast of the Lamb. In the Church, it doesn't matter what we see you wear. It doesn't matter how dressed up you are. It doesn't matter how new or old or fancy or plain or clean or dirty your physical clothes are. It only matters that you're wearing the robe of righteousness that is your faith.

By faith we heed God's invitation to join him with Christ in heaven. By faith, we put lay down our earthly concerns and come gladly to the banquet hall of the Church. By faith we join with all the saints in the wedding feast where Christ is our heavenly bridegroom, and we are his cherished bride.

In his Church—at his feast— God asks us, "Friend, how did you come in here?" But unlike the speechless garment-less man in the parable, we have something to say. When God says, "How did you come in here," we say, "I came in here by faith because I heard your invitation. I came in here by faith because I need the food you've

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prepared for my body and soul. I came in here by faith because I need the communion of my brothers and sisters who are already here. I came in here by faith because above all else, I need Christ, my divine bridegroom who has called me to join him." That's what we say every Sunday when we recite the Creed. It's what we say every day by our lives of faith, by worshiping together, by regularly feasting on the good gifts of God.

We answer God's question with our confession by word and deed because Christ himself has given us our wedding garment. He gave us our wedding clothes on Calvary. Christ was bound hand and foot and taken away to the cross. Christ was stripped and crucified naked on the cross to expose our sin to the judgment of God, our King—even our sin of judging others by their clothes. Christ was crucified naked, while he wept and gnashed his teeth in his agonizing death.

Christ was crucified with no clothes that his blood might not be hindered as it flows down upon us to wash our souls clean in his forgiveness and wash our robes white in his blood. By Christ's crucifixion he has clothed us in the wedding garment of our salvation. And by his resurrection he has opened wide the door into the great marriage feast of heaven.

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So, we answer God's invitation to his Son's wedding feast with faith. We answer God by returning to our baptism, where the Spirit first covered us with the robe which Christ provides. We return to baptism in confessing our sins on earth and Christ welcomes us into heaven where there are no more sins at all. We answer God by feasting on his body and blood in this place while Christ serves as both host and meal in the heavenly wedding banquet right here in our midst. We answer God by joining together in hymns, singing and making melody to the Lord in our hearts while giving thanks for his invitation to the great high feast of his Son, Jesus Christ.

Such feasting, through our repentance, our hearing the Word of God, our celebration of the Sacraments and our sacrifice of praise is but a preview here of our eternal life with God in eternity. For when Christ returns, he shall welcome us into the eternal wedding feast of heaven and we shall wear our wedding garments and celebrate the wedding feast for all eternity in the presence of Almighty God. For the Kingdom of Heaven, Christ says, 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.

You have been invited. You've been properly clothed with faith. You've been welcomed by Christ to the feast here on earth. And by

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God's grace, you will celebrate forever at the marriage feast of the Lamb in heaven above.

So, it turns out that clothes do make the man and the woman and every child of God. So, wear the proper clothes to the theatre. I'll continue to abide by the dress code for pastors. But greater than any of that, wear your wedding garment of faith in the assurance of God's welcome to the marriage feast of his Son, and in the blessing of your divine marriage to Christ, our heavenly bridegroom. This garment of faithfulness is the most important thing you're wearing now. It's what you'll be wearing in heaven and it's what you'll wear forever with the saints in light in the presence of Christ. Amen.