

October 15, 2017  
Pentecost 19  
Isaiah 25:1-9; Psalm 23; Philippians 4:1-9; Matthew 22:1-14  
What Would You Wear?  
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Fellow Ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Gracia y paz del Dio; Padre, Hijo e Espíritu Santo. Grace to you and peace from God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe"? Matthew 22:12

"Did you wear THAT to church?" My mother asked this every time I visited her at the Adult Foster Care Home where she lived the last two years of her life.

There were rules about what was acceptable "Sunday Best" clothing. No white shoes before Memorial Day or after Labor Day, except, of course Easter. Shoes always polished. White ankle socks and Mary Janes on the girls. Crisp, white t-shirts under clean, pressed shirts. A slip under every dress. What we wore to church mattered to my mother. She saw to it that her seven children looked respectable in the sanctuary. She wanted us to "fit in", to be appropriate. She did not want us to look different from the rest of the congregation.

There is a little of my mom in each of us. It is often uncomfortable to welcome one who is different. Even in this place, it is difficult to welcome the stranger, to embrace the foreign, whether it is music or language. Differences are often just barely tolerated. This week's Gospel lesson seems to support that kind of thinking.

The parable tells of a wedding banquet, put on by a wealthy king. Everyone is invited, well, everyone who is important. But the guests decided they had better things to do; or were too important; or got a better offer or were too tired. Some even abused and murdered the king's messengers. The king, furious sends the army to kill the guests and destroy their city. He sends his servants out again. This time they are to invite everyone else, good and bad. The king wanted a full banquet hall. Even a full banquet hall did not please this king. One of the guests made a fatal mistake. He did not wear a proper wedding garment. The king tossed him out, permanently into the outer darkness where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth. This parable is puzzling, even disturbing.

Early last week about 100 Oregon pastors gathered at the Bishop's Convocation. Many of us shared the same sentiment. Some admitted relief because they would NOT be preaching this week. Some, including me were planning to focus on the other readings. I mean, who doesn't love to hear the good news in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, or Paul's joyful letter to the Philippians? And then there is this "elephant in the room" parable that is troubling. But, when something in scripture troubles us, it usually means we need to wrestle with it, not avoid it.

Jesus says, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son". We cannot avoid talking about the kingdom of heaven. But, what is this gospel writer trying to tell us about Jesus and the kingdom? Context is important in this section of Matthew. Jesus and the disciples are in Jerusalem. It is the week before his crucifixion. He is locked in debate with the leaders of the Israelites: Sadducees, Pharisees, Scribes, and the Chief Priests. We have heard Jesus indict them with various parables over the last few weeks. By prefacing his parables with the phrase: "the kingdom of heaven is like", he draws them in, gets them nodding in agreement, then pulls the rug out from under them. Each time, the leaders see that they are the disobedient sons or the murderous tenants. They bring condemnation on themselves by their judgmental responses to Jesus' parables.

Those who think they God's chosen are the ones who turn down the invitation to the banquet. Those who think they are the righteous ones are the ones wearing the wrong clothes. Those who think they are the "insiders" find themselves the "outsiders." The leaders are so enraged they want to kill Jesus, and eventually accomplish their desire.

We, who are today's "insiders" among the people of God, must take care that we don't point an accusing finger at these leaders too quickly! We who are the keepers of the faith, pastor, council members, leaders and members may find ourselves indicted in the same way that our ancestors in the faith were. We wonder at our empty pews, but the truth is, maybe we're expecting our guests to wear "proper wedding garments". Maybe, we need to check our own garments.

There is a concept trending on the internet called "30 Outfit Mistakes That Make You Look Messy". Google it and dozens of variations come up. One poses this premise: "*When you absolutely need to look your best, you have to pay attention to the little things.*" <http://www.healthyway.com/content/outfit-mistakes-that-will-make-you-look-messy>

The parable we hear today reminds us to pay attention to "the little things" It is not about clothing our bodies, it is about clothing our souls. It is about presenting the inclusive gospel of Jesus Christ to a world that is obsessed with who is "in" and who is "out". Who are the cool kids in school? Who are the powerful in government and industry? Who has the best of the best?

Deciding who is "in" and who is "out" is not the work we are called to do. We are called to be the slaves, sent out into the streets to gather everyone we can find, good and the bad, saint and sinner and invite them to the banquet. It is the King's business to decide from there. Jesus decided who is "in" by going to the cross for the good and the bad, for the insider and the outsider, the well-dressed and the poorly dressed, for you and for me.

The kingdom of heaven can be compared to a wedding feast where all are welcome, and that means ALL! We rejoice together at this table because, as Paul says "the Lord is near". Jesus is present in, with and under this bread and wine, the banquet to which we are invited week after week.

There is no requirement to wear your Sunday best. The only requirement here is to LIVE your Sunday best, every day. True discipleship reflects the life to which God has called us. It is a life ignorant of outward fashion, filled with whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, It is a life in which we look for that which is excellent. A life in which, if there is anything worthy of praise, we think about those things.

And while we think on these uplifting things, we pray for those people in our world who feel left out. Better yet, we go out from this place to invite and walk with them in Jesus' name no matter how they are dressed.

Thanks be to God.