

Dressed Right

Bible Reading:

Isaiah 61:8-11

Matthew 22:1-14

Colossians 3:1-17

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It happened twice again this week. What's become all too common a scene here at Calvin Church this year. We accompanied two of our families to the graveside. And had to lay to rest two precious grandmothers. We did so, speaking and taking comfort in the eternal home in glory that was waiting for them. That is a comfort which gives strength to a heart that otherwise is ready to break; and eases the pressure when faced with a huge, cavernous gap in one's life which this dear person used to occupy.

Welcomed into the banquet hall of heaven.

But what if it wasn't so?

What if, standing there at the entrance, you were turned away?

What if that place in heaven wasn't available for you?

That's not just some theoretical question.

I've sat with people who have wondered, and even worried, about precisely that question.

What if?

I'd ask them, "*Is there a place for you in heaven when you die?*"

And the answer comes back, "*I hope so.*"

A ringing affirmation of spiritual hesitation.

I'd like to say....

I think so....

but what if.....

could it be....

....maybe I'll be turned away!

Some of us have faced it in different situations.

I was touring Parliament Hill some months ago, and while waiting for the guide to show us through the Centre Block I wandered somewhat to the side. Let me assure you that it wasn't very long before a guard came and asked me for ID. Which, of course, I didn't have. So, quickly whisked back to the group area to wait with everyone else.

No proper authorization.

No admittance.

Or last week, preparing to board a plane. The nice lady at security told me, with a polite smile which exuded an attitude of zero tolerance, that there was no way I would make it further than the scanning gate dressed as I was. The coat and shoes had to go. Off with them and into the bucket, or I could leave.

So - alter my attire to comply, and then, safely through, everything scanned and cleared, away to catch my flight.

What if, standing at the scanning booth of heaven, I **didn't** make it through?

What if, waiting for admittance, I was turned away?

Then what?

We've been spending these weeks after Easter considering various issues related to the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Today's concern is one of those issues.

Fellow pilgrims in faith, let me assure you that as you turn your thoughts towards the day when Christ comes back -

- or, if that is preceded by our death, then the moment that our bodies expire and our souls are carried before the judgement throne of God -

as you turn your thoughts towards that day,
please remember -

| we **don't** have to go through our lives worrying about what our eternal outcome will be.

| We **don't** have to live in spiritual uncertainty or anxiety.

Thirty years ago, when I was receiving my first evangelism training, our instructor drilled into our heads these words from 1 John 5:

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may **know** that you have eternal life. (v.13)*

It doesn't say - "**hope** that you have eternal life."

It doesn't say - "**wonder** if you have eternal life."

It says - "*that you may **know** that you have eternal life.*"

Let us hear from the lips of Jesus teaching about this question; teaching that allows St. John to make this confident statement to those of us who may just be tempted to sometimes question and wonder,

a little bit, anyway,
about our eternal destiny -

Matthew 22:1-14 p.24 (NT)

Verses one to seven are spoken directly to the people surrounding Jesus while He taught. They are directed especially to the spiritual leadership of that people, the leadership that was so dead set against Jesus and His claim of divine direction, inspiration and life.

It's very blunt in its message - God, the Sovereign King of the Cosmos, has sent a personal message to invitees - His chosen Old Testament people of Israel. But they refuse to come; refuse to be His guests at the eternal banquet table. They kill His servants, including the prophets and John the Baptist. Finally, they kill the greatest of servants, His own Son.

God is enraged and condemns them.

Their city is destroyed.

And that, historically, is exactly what happened in AD 70 when Jerusalem, the city that had rejected Jesus, was destroyed by the Romans.

The next part of the parable, Part B, is verses eight to fourteen. The circle is expanded now beyond the Jewish people.

All that the slaves could find - *good and bad*, says v.10 - are brought to the banquet hall.

Yes, these words of Jesus are directed to all who will hear. They are spoken, and later written, to all who have any question about their eternal future.

They are directed right at me and you as we think about our forever.

The parable speaks of God's great and gracious act of welcoming those who were estranged into the intimacy of His family; inviting them to join in the great banquet feast where the Bride is joined to His Son, the groom.

Throughout the Bible *bride* is picture language for the people whom God has called, those who believe in Him and surrender their lives to Him. The wedding is the great and final day of cosmic history, when Jesus returns as Judge.

That will be the day when the tragedy of Eden lost, where God wandered Paradise and called, "*Adam, where are you?*"

– where that tragedy will be reversed.

The heavenly Father and His children will be together again, face to face. We will enjoy His full divine presence; nothing held back!

Many are invited to that very special celebration - to be part of the reunion between God and humanity.

The invitations go far wider than we dream of or hope, drawing in ones that we, perhaps, would walk right by.

The Heavenly Groom says "*Come.*"

And they do.

But this one guest - Everyone else is dressed in their best, in wedding finery. Their wedding best is different from person to person, for each is of different means. But each in their own way has on the best. Some in tuxes, some in borrowed house ties. But all showing that this moment was special.

Except this fellow -- who's just wearing whatever. Track pants and t-shirt, say. Saturday morning in the backyard sort of fare.

He's his own man.

Life plays by his rules.

He just does it.

He'll wear what he decides he wants to wear.

The host, however, doesn't play the "*whatever*" game.

There is, it seems, a specific wardrobe required for entrance to the banquet.

The wedding banquet of the Son of God is coming.

We have an invitation to attend. But the Father of the Groom wants us decked out in wedding attire. It's not so that anything goes. We can't simply take the invitation, tuck it in our pocket and carry on as though nothing has changed. We can't go straight to the party from the garage, so to speak. There needs to be new clothes.

God, says the parable, has certain clothing requirements for heaven.
If you don't wear these clothes, you don't make it past screening.
You don't get in.

Clothing and God.

Understand, right up front that this parable is talking about a wardrobe of the heart. Not the outer veneer of cotton and rayon.

The parable is telling us that a relationship with Eternal God is not something that we can set on our own terms.

We can't come in a way that **we** think to be adequate.

It's not the case that what **I** think to be appropriate **is** appropriate.

It's not about **my** understanding of God.

It's not about **my** practice of spirituality.

There's something specific required in which I need to wrap myself.

When I read this parable I hear in the background echos of the prophet Isaiah –

*"I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For He has **clothed me** with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."* (Is 61.10)

He has clothed me.

Garments of salvation.

Robes of righteousness.

Getting right to the heart of it, hear these words from the Bible about the wardrobe God presents to us:

"But clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and forget about satisfying your sinful self."
(Rom 13:14)

"You were all clothed with Christ. This means that you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3:27)

We're not talking the stuff of fabric.

What we're talking about is having our heart and mind and soul and life wrapped up in Jesus Christ.

And that comes as a total, free gift to us.

In ancient times, the host of the wedding banquet would have wedding clothes ready for the guests. He provided them. They accepted them.

In one of Jesus' most famous parables, that of the Prodigal Son, Jesus tells of the Waiting Father who, when the son staggers home, says to his servants,

“Bring the best clothes and put them on him.” (Lk 15:22).

And then the Father throws a banquet for that beggar son who gratefully accepts what is given to him.

So the message of this banquet clothing parable in Matthew 22 comes home to us. When we confess our weakness, our limitations, our inadequacies, and invite Jesus to enter our lives -
- he does.

More than just taking a seat in some small corner, He comes right in.

He wraps His loving, caring, empowering self around us.

He flows right through us.

That’s what it means to be “*clothed with Christ.*”

Or,

as Romans 8:1 puts it,
to be “*in Christ.*”

Think of our lives as being a very decent set of clothing.

Nice shirt. Clean, pressed Dockers. Even stain resistant.

But stuff happens.

Life happens.

And... well...

As I asked the *Exploring Our Faith* classes this Spring -

Do you ever make it through a day, even one day, and come out knowing that you did it
all right, perfect, not one single flub?

How about holding it down, say, to three wrong things a day?

Three stains on your record?

Could you?

If you could -

- and I, by the way, can’t -

if you could,

in one year, how many would that be?

So - what’s happened to that decent set of clothing that represents your life?

That nice shirt covering your heart and thought life?

Those stain resistant Dockers covering your legs that take you different places?

Starting to get blotchy?

Even dirty?

In one year, at three stains a day, that’s about one thousand.

In my life -

to this point anyway,

there’s about 45,000 stains

.....in the best-case scenario.

I resonate with the words of the prophet Isaiah when he writes, “*Our acts are like filthy rags.*” (Is 64:6).

What about you?

I need the free clothing of Jesus.

I can't even pretend to hope that my stain-blotched clothes will make it as appropriate wear into the eternal banquet hall of God.

I need to be wrapped in the clothing of Jesus.

The clothing that is pictured in the book of Revelation as white clothes.

At Kieny Hoolwerf's funeral on Friday we read these words from Revelation 7:

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing **white robes** and were holding palm branches in their hands.

And they cried out in a loud voice:

“Salvation belongs to our God,

who sits on the throne,

and to the Lamb.”

They are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple.... Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst... [And Christ] will be their shepherd; He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Beautiful, white clothing.

In other words, a beautiful, pure, perfect life.

That is Jesus' gift to us.

It's what He wraps us in when we surrender our lives to Him.

And takes our blotches and stains on himself.

Which, as Max Lucado notes [*When Christ Comes* p.62] is why Jesus is **not** depicted in white clothing in the Revelation.

Instead, Revelation 19 shows Jesus “*dressed in a robe dipped in blood.*” It is His blood shed for our sin.

Blood is the Bible's image for life.

The power of life is in blood.

Where blood flows, life is found.

Jesus' life was poured out on the cross so that we could live.

When you hear church talk, Christian phrases, about being “*covered in the blood of Jesus,*” it means having our lives covered over, clothed in, the life power of Jesus.

Give your life to Jesus.

His blood life will wash over you, wrap around you.

You will be,

in the beautiful eyes of God,

you will be seen as someone dressed in pure, dazzling white.

you will be pure.

perfect.

You will be,
in the beautiful eyes of God,
dressed in perfect wedding clothes.

And
you
will
be
welcomed
in.

Brothers and sisters,
Kiemy told me a couple of weeks ago how she longed to leave this earth -
- to have Jesus come and take her.
She was ready.
She knew the clothing that the Saviour had dressed her in.

How about you?
Are you dressed?

Hear again these words from John's first letter.
Say them with me -

*And this is the testimony -
God has given us life, and this life is in His Son.
He who has the Son has life.
He who does not have the Son of God does not have life.
I write these things to you
who believe in the name of the Son of God
so that you may **KNOW** that you have eternal life.*

[1 John 5:11-13]