

Sermon and Prayers for Sunday, October 11, 2020  
19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (week 28), year A  
Bishop Bill Gafkjen, Indiana-Kentucky Synod, ELCA  
*Isaiah 25:1-9; Psalm 23; Philippians 4:1-9; Matthew 22:1-14*

Isaiah 25:1-9

O LORD, you are my God;  
I will exalt you, I will praise your name;  
for you have done wonderful things,  
plans formed of old, faithful and sure.  
For you have made the city a heap,  
the fortified city a ruin;  
the palace of aliens is a city no more,  
it will never be rebuilt.  
Therefore strong peoples will glorify you;  
cities of ruthless nations will fear you.  
For you have been a refuge to the poor,  
a refuge to the needy in their distress,  
a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat.  
When the blast of the ruthless was like a winter rainstorm,  
the noise of aliens like heat in a dry place,  
you subdued the heat with the shade of clouds;  
the song of the ruthless was stilled.

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples  
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,  
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.  
And he will destroy on this mountain  
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,  
the sheet that is spread over all nations;  
he will swallow up death forever.  
Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces,  
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,  
for the LORD has spoken.  
It will be said on that day,  
Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.  
This is the LORD for whom we have waited;  
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Philippians 4:1-9

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.  
Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with

thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

#### Matthew 22:1-14

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

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Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in abundance, from God our creator, through the Lord Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen

I must confess that I’m a little concerned that I might not have “ears to hear” this parable of Jesus that Matthew gives us today.

A king plans a banquet in celebration of his son’s wedding. Not one of the originally invited guests can be bothered to come. The king sends his servants out to invite pretty much anyone else they can find and haul them in. As the king strolls through the hall finally filled with guests, he spies a guy without the attire that the king expects all guests to wear...apparently even if they’ve been hauled in off the street at the last minute. The king has this guy tossed out of the party and into outer darkness.

Yikes! Is that what the kingdom of heaven is like?

After multiple readings and reflections on this text, I finally noticed a curious phrase at the beginning of the parable. Jesus does **not** say here what he does in many other places, that the kingdom of heaven is **like** this king.

Jesus introduces this particular parable by saying that “the kingdom of heaven may be *compared to* a king who gave a wedding banquet...” In other words, having ears to hear this parable may need to include careful reflection on how God’s reign, the way God operates in the world, the kingdom of heaven, is **and is not** like the way this earthly king operates.

When we lay this passage of scripture alongside the ministry of Jesus, other parables of Jesus, the teaching of Jesus, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, and the ways those who follow Jesus are called to live throughout rest of the New Testament, it becomes pretty clear that God does not reject and toss into outer darkness the very ones that God has invited to the party, just because they aren't wearing the right outfit.

In fact, in the kingdom of heaven – unlike the kingdoms of earth – this guy would be **given** the robe that he is expected to wear and which witnesses to his being part of the party.

We are given the wedding robe when we die and rise with Christ through the water and Word of Holy Baptism. God gathers us from streets, and byways, and outer darkness into a place at the banquet prepared by Christ. As the water washes over us we are clothed in the beautiful robes of forgiveness, peace, and cruciform love of Christ.

All this God does freely, as a gift, as we are...not because we've somehow made ourselves worthy in ways expected by the kingdoms of earth.

Of course, this does not mean that living as children of God, subjects of the reign of God, does not make a difference in what we wear as a reflection of who and whose we are, who God has re-made us to be. God's grace changes us, transforms us, fills us with Holy Spirit for being the body of Christ decked out in the clothes of Christ.

In light of this, Presbyterian Pastor Kathryn Johnston has wondered about the guy in the parable: "Maybe...a lack of a wedding robe reflects an inner apathy toward being a guest at the banquet."<sup>i</sup>

Is it possible that we grow apathetic about being a cross-marked Spirit-sealed follower of Jesus and, so, don't wear the robes he's given us?

Is it possible that we get swayed into wearing other robes that reflect other loyalties and commitments that, in the end, cover over rather than complement the clothes given us by Christ?

Suspecting that this is more than possible and, rather, quite probable, the apostle Paul encouraged the Christian community at Philippi to "stand firm in the Lord."

"Finally, beloved," he concluded, "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen...and the God of peace will be with you."<sup>ii</sup>

In other words, being Christian changes our wardrobe! To be marked with the cross of Christ and sealed with his Spirit transforms our lives and our behavior and calls us to wear the clothes Christ gives us, not the other stuff that we are tempted so often to wear.

Paul put this even more explicitly in his letter to the Colossian Christians:

“So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God...

As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body.”

Wear the clothes Christ gave you.

It’s how we celebrate the banquet of forgiveness and compassion, justice and peace, healing and hope that God has hauled us into. And if God’s will is to be done on earth as it is in heaven, the world, the nation, the communities, the neighborhoods and families in which we live need so desperately for us to wear the clothes that Christ gave us and to invite others to wear them, too.

As Pastor Johnston puts it again:

“Paul reminds the Philippians [and us] that it is something different to be a disciple of Christ than to simply be a citizen of Rome. We dress our hearts differently.”

What might it look like for us to dress our hearts in the clothes of kindness and compassion, forgiveness and patience, justice and truth, and, above all, love...

...on Facebook and Twitter?

...in conversations about racism and white supremacy?

...when we see a neighbor in need or who has been tossed by someone or some community into outer darkness?

...in discussions and decisions about how to be the body of Christ, how to be church, in this time and this place?

...as election day draws near and after it has passed?

Just imagine how the world will be changed – how we will be changed – when we dress our hearts daily in the clothes Christ has given us and make sure that anything else we wear complements Christ’s clothes rather than covering or replacing them!

Might it be possible that the peace of Christ will be with us and with our world in new and life-giving ways?

God has promised that it will be so.

Of course, this dressing our hearts in Christ’s clothing does not come naturally to us, sinners as we are. We so easily forget or overlook who and whose we are and keep trying on the outfits of other kingdoms.

Maybe that’s why Martin Luther suggested that we be intentional and disciplined in leaning into the life-giving rhythm of daily dying and rising with Christ. In the “Small Catechism” Luther wrote<sup>iii</sup>:

“In the morning, as soon as you get out of bed, you are to make the sign of the holy cross and say: God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit watch over me. Amen.”

“Clothe me,” we might also pray as we get ready for the day, “clothe me in your forgiveness, grace, and love.”

And then we step into the day with our hearts dressed in the wedding robe of the crucified and risen Christ.

And, when we fail, when we try on the clothes of hurt or hate, in the power of the Spirit we repent, confess, and are hauled by the Holy Spirit again and again to the banquet of the rich food and fine wine of forgiveness, love, and grace that God in Christ crucified and risen prepares for us, for all peoples, and we are robed again in God’s good grace to go out and share the abundance with others.

Thanks be to God.

Amen

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<sup>i</sup> “Sunday’s Coming Premium” email resource from *Christian Century*, October 5, 2020.

<sup>ii</sup> Colossians 3:1-15

<sup>iii</sup> “The Morning Blessing” in *Martin Luther’s Small Catechism*.

### Prayers of Intercession

With confidence in God’s grace and mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

#### *A brief silence.*

Gracious host, fill your church with a spirit of joyous hospitality. We pray for bishops, teachers, church leaders, and all children of God as they invite others to your table of boundless grace. Lord, in your mercy,

#### **hear our prayer.**

Gracious host, as creation waits with eager longing for redemption, protect your creatures that are mistreated. Restore valleys, mountains and pastures, and still and running waters. Lord, in your mercy,

#### **hear our prayer.**

Gracious host, as you set a table in the presence of enemies, so bless the efforts of diplomats, international peace workers, and world leaders who navigate conflict. May they proceed with dialogue and understanding, so that justice and peace prevails. Lord, in your mercy,

#### **hear our prayer.**

Gracious host, let your gentleness be known among those who are weary or ill (*especially those we name now*). Strengthen doctors, medical care workers, and caretakers who see to their needs. Lord, in your mercy,

#### **hear our prayer.**

Gracious host, when we are quick to judge outward appearance, remind us how you clothe all in your mercy. We pray for ministries that provide needed clothing and other personal care assistance in this community. Lord, in your mercy,

#### **hear our prayer.**

Gracious host, as we remember those who have died and are gathered at the heavenly banquet, comfort us with your presence. Assure us of your peace at all times. Lord, in your mercy,

#### **hear our prayer.**

Listen as we call on you, O God, and enfold in your loving arms all for whom we pray, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**