

Dreghorn and Springside Parish Church, Sunday 11th October 2020

Introduction to the Bible reading

You can tell a lot about someone from the clothes they wear. The clothes we wear can reflect our occupation, our status, our values, and even our priorities. At a red-carpet event you might hear a reporter ask actors "Who are you wearing?" to find out which designer created their clothes. In the ancient world clothing had a similar significance. It could reflect a person's occupation, social and economic status, their mood, or even their character. Today's reading ends tells us about a party where one of the guests turned up wearing the wrong clothes - what can that mean?

Matthew 22:1-14 (The Message)

¹⁻³ Jesus responded by telling still more stories. "God's kingdom," he said, "is like a king who threw a wedding banquet for his son. He sent out servants to call in all the invited guests. And they wouldn't come!

⁴ "He sent out another round of servants, instructing them to tell the guests, 'Look, everything is on the table, the prime rib is ready for carving. Come to the feast!'

⁵⁻⁷ "They only shrugged their shoulders and went off, one to weed his garden, another to work in his shop. The rest, with nothing better to do, beat up on the messengers and then killed them. The king was outraged and sent his soldiers to destroy those thugs and level their city.

⁸⁻¹⁰ "Then he told his servants, 'We have a wedding banquet all prepared but no guests. The ones I invited weren't up to it. Go out into the busiest intersections in town and invite anyone you find to the banquet.' The servants went out on the streets and rounded up everyone they laid eyes on, good and bad, regardless. And so the banquet was on—every place filled.

¹¹⁻¹³ "When the king entered and looked over the scene, he spotted a man who wasn't properly dressed. He said to him, 'Friend, how dare you come in here looking like that!' The man was speechless. Then the king told his servants, 'Get him out of here—fast. Tie him up and ship him to hell. And make sure he doesn't get back in.'

¹⁴ "That's what I mean when I say, 'Many get invited; only a few make it.'"

Sermon: Clothed in Christ

I was forever turning up in the wrong rig. That's Navy speak for uniform. And whether it was at formal events like Wardroom or Mess functions or informal events I would get the uniform wrong. I remember just before leaving, having one last go at Phys with Marines. Now if you were turning up for a PE session what would you wear, trainers, T shirt, shorts that kind of thing? No, they turned up wearing boots and combats.

Today is a story that ends with a man who turned up wearing the wrong clothes. Jesus begins by telling us that the Kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepares a feast. The guests don't have to roll up their sleeves, peel the potatoes or save up enough cash to afford a gourmet banquet. No, it is all done by God. All the guests have to do is show up... hungry!

But this matter of "showing up" is just the problem: no one does. Jesus was alluding to God sending his servants (the prophets) to Israel to invite them to the God's great banquet - and by and large, the people ignored them. Again, God sent more; he sent John the Baptist, he sent his own Son Jesus Christ, he sent the disciples and again, by and large they ignored them. John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, the martyr Stephen, and many, many more all died at the hands of the original invited guests. The king in our parable can't believe it. He has been offended, the people at the top of his invitation list have rebelled, so he visits mayhem on the party shirkers.

The king is not going to let his good food go to waste, so he sends out some more servants. "Go into the streets bring in the rest; the ordinary folks with 2.4 kids, bring in the family makers, bring in the employed, bring in the retired, the school kids, bring in the unemployed. Don't stop there though bring in the unemployable, bring in the rough sleepers, go into the jail - fling wide the gates and lead out the cons. Away and empty a homeless shelter or two. Whatever you do don't discriminate. Invite the lot!

Before the evening is out the king's banquet hall is filled. It is choca-block with people who cannot believe their good fortune. Folks who might be more accustomed to drinking from a brown bag down on a bench suddenly find themselves sipping the finest champagne. Prisoners, whose entire daily food bill comes in at just over £2, suddenly get to enjoy the finest gourmet dining. It is an extravagant scene which, in its extravagance also tells us something about God's amazing grace. God does not scrimp, he gives his all!

One of the odd things though about this parable is the sting that it has in its tail. We hear of a man turned up in the wrong clothes. It would appear that in the Kingdom of heaven, the missing attire, the missing clothing, is the clothing that is Christ. So, let's think some more about this clothing?

I'll give you three images to ponder. The first is a view from Christ's tailor shop. The second is the image of a precious painting. The third, well seeing as it's a lush party, let's make the third a wee sparkly number.

The first is from Christ's tailor shop. A few years ago fifty or so, Oscar statues were stolen. There was a panic and a huge hunt for the stolen Oscars. Eventually, and just in time, they were recovered again by a street person who found them hidden under a wheelie bin. In gratitude for his honesty the Academy rewarded the man by giving him a good seat at the Oscars, taking him there in a limo and fitting him with the finest tuxedo. Something like that happens when we are clothed in Christ. In Galatians 3:26, 27 we read, 'It is through faith that all of you are God's children in union with Christ Jesus. You were baptized into union with Christ, and now you are clothed, so to speak, with the life of Christ himself.' We cannot, as the person in the parable apparently did, bypass Christ's tailor's shop; we cannot skip the Jesus queue and still enjoy the banquet. As it again reminds us in Colossians 3:12-14, "So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it."

The second image of the precious painting comes from the Exodus story. Way back, on the night before Pharaoh freed Israel to go and worship God in the desert, Moses instructed all the people of Israel to get painting. On that fateful night the people of Israel prepared and ate a lamb. The blood of that lamb was painted over the door, so that when the Angel of Death came to bring judgement on Pharaoh and the Egyptians it would Passover the Israelites homes and leave them untouched. The second image then of being clothed with Christ is being covered by his blood. That when judgement comes, as it will, Christ, our Passover lamb, covers us and the Angel of Death passes on by.

And the third image is that wee sparkly number, I mentioned. The theologian, Tom Wright in his book, 'The day the Revolution Began', encourages us to imagine that when we are born, God gives each one of us a mirror. And what do we do with that mirror? Well, you know what we're like - we turn it inwards and we live all our lives admiring and preening ourselves. But the mirror we've been given isn't for our self-love and self-infatuation. We have been made in the image of God and this mirror helps us reflect that image of God to others. Tom Wright encourages us to take that mirror we've been given – and turn it away from ourselves and outwards at a 45-degree angle. That means that when people look at us, they don't see us, but they see us reflecting God to them. Reflecting

God in the way we live; as a person who shows God's loving kindness to others, his justice, his mercy, his faithfulness, his grace, his truth, all reflected in our lives. And in return we reflect the worship of creation back to God.

So, what will God see when he looks on each of us in his banqueting hall? Will he see faith in Christ that clothes you? Will he see the blood of Christ that covers you? Will he see you, reflecting him, his love, his goodness, his grace in this broken world?

Pause for a moment in quiet. Let's thank God for this invitation that he gives to each one of us, let's take the opportunity to say sorry if we have treated his invitation with disrespect, let's ask that we be clothed afresh again this day in the love of God and let's live a life that both reflects God's goodness and gives him all the praise. Amen.

Jamie Milliken
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