

Garments of the Heart

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Year A: 20th Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 22:1-10 Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ² “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³ He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴ 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.’ ⁵ But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶ while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷ The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸ Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ ¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹² and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. ¹³ 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.’ ¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

God invites us to a life of joy from God's unending love and grace. This grace is a gift and responsibility. God desires to grow us into more than we already are; disciples. We practice putting on the garments of the heart every day.

Why on earth did the King throw out the wedding guest who didn't have the correct clothes? What is going on?

When the other people were brought in from the street, did they all just happen to have a wedding robe in their backpacks? Or was there a huge closet of garments that everyone else got steered to, but because this guy got stuck in traffic, he missed that announcement?

It seems over the top, doesn't it? Actually, theologians believe these are two different parables. Likewise, there are multiple answers for this King who goes quite mad over the ill-dressed wedding guest.

One explanation is that Matthew's community was very concerned about insiders and outsiders. Those who were following Jesus and those who weren't. Secondly, because the King addresses him as friend, perhaps it's a reference to Judas. The friend who betrays Jesus. Or there were two other stories taught by Rabbis which Jesus would have

known, about kings and royal robes. These included wise and foolish recipients of the robes and how they took care of, or didn't take care of the beautiful garments.ⁱ

We'll return to these verses in a minute. But for now, think about the clothes in your closet. When it was 95 degrees this summer, we had our shorts and t-shirts. While it's yet warm, the mornings are now cooler, and perhaps you've grabbed your favorite light sweater or jeans to pop on. But you might also have that one dress, or really nice suit you bring out to wear on special, joyful occasions.

There was a king who had deep joy for his son was getting married. If you've ever had one of your children get married, you know this feeling. You approve of the fiancé, the date is set and you rejoice for the happy couple. This King was excited to share the happy occasion with all his subjects. He was anticipating wearing his finest royal robe for the wedding and banquet!

In ancient days, it was completely normal for invitations to get sent out announcing the wedding feast. But not until everything was ready, were the servants sent out to tell the guests it was now time to come.

What was not normal in an honor and shame culture, was for the invited guests to refuse to come. That never would have happened. If you were on the list, you went when it was time. It was a joyous event. There was food! Wine! Dancing! Speeches. The whole village came and it lasted seven days. There was laughter and happiness!

In Jesus' telling of the parable, the people who didn't attend, were taking care of business and tending to important matters. But imagine walking with your pair of oxen, plowing the hard dirt, sweating in the sun, while hearing the music and laughter of the wedding off in the distance. The smell of cooked lamb wafted your way. It smelled delicious. For a moment you wondered whether you could have made time to attend. You had put on the garment of busy-ness.

It has been said, 'Don't be so busy making a living that you fail to make a life.' We can get trapped by our to-do lists, or entranced with the voices all around us, they keep us from responding to the still small voice of God who is constantly calling and inviting, calling and inviting.ⁱⁱ Notice me. Listen to me. Be grateful. Know the joy and gladness my Son offers you! Remember how Jesus said: 'I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete!' (John 15:11)

Can we imagine the King's great disappointment when no one shows up for the wedding banquet? He was really hurt. The invited guests were the Jews, chosen long ago as

God's people. But when God's Son came, there were Jews who still didn't believe in Him even after repeated invitations to know and follow Jesus. They were wearing garments of disbelief.

Thus, when the invited guests don't arrive, people in the streets are invited in. The servants went out onto Eisenhower and Garfield, on Taft and 4th, on 1st street going east towards I-25. Anyone, and everyone they met were invited. It didn't matter your family status, your job, your rap sheet, your ethnic background, your political affiliation. The 'good and the bad' were all invited in. They were delighted!

This is you and me! The sinners. The Gentiles. Those who hadn't heard of or who had no connection with the King. This is God's arms wide open invitation to all! Pure grace.

King of Glory, we do well at wearing garments of hospitality and grace. Over and over again, I hear guests say, "I've never been at such a friendly church." I watch you seek out those you don't know. You shake their hands. You tell them your name. You help them to feel welcome. It doesn't matter their skin color, or sexual preference. Their social status or age. Thank you!

I will still encourage us to find and wear those garments of invitation. There are more of God's children waiting to be invited. They are longing to be included and hear a message of love. The King has already issued an invite. But they need someone to follow up. Will it be us?

Now back to the friend thrown out of the wedding celebration by way of a story.

In July 2017, 25-year-old Purdue University pharmacy student Sarah Cummins called off her \$30,000 wedding. Left with a non-refundable, 170-plate contract at the luxury Ritz Charles event center, she and her ex-fiancé decided to coordinate with local shelters. She invited dozens of residents from local homeless shelters and veterans' organizations to a formal sit-down dinner. As word spread, local businesses and residents even donated formal suits and dresses so the guests could dress up for the occasion. Guests dined on chicken breast with artichokes and Chardonnay cream sauce and wedding cake. The former bride, Sarah Cummins, greeted the guests as they arrived and helped serve dinner saying, "Someone else's dignity will rise from my disappointment."ⁱⁱⁱ Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the evening. Sarah chose to wear the robe of generosity instead of her wedding gown.

Just as Sarah the bride, intentionally changed 'garments' after cancelling her wedding, so to, God asks us to change our garments. God's gift of grace is that everyone is invited to

the wedding! Everyone! Any thoughts about ‘am I good enough’ or ‘does God truly love me?’ are scattered when God as the King, invites everyone he can find.

And with great grace, comes response, comes responsibility. God’s children are called to live with intention. The question we ask ourselves as we are standing in front of our closets, pertains not only to our outer clothes, but also to our inner clothes. “What will I wear today?” Garments of the heart, mind and soul are just as important.

With what spirit will we enter God’s house for worship? Expectation that the Holy Spirit will speak to us? Will we wear the sweatshirt of humility and reverence? Or choose to wear robes of self-importance before our creator?

With what spirit will we enter our workplace? Will we wear the soft shirt of patience, or the scratchy wool sweater of impatience?

With what spirit will we approach our spouse, partner or family members? Will we wear that robe of kindness or the pants of harshness?

The King threw out the unrobed wedding guest, because the guest wasn’t willing to change. He wasn’t willing to put on anything else except the same clothes he wore day after day. God doesn’t want us to keep committing the same sins day after day after day. God has already changed us when we were baptized into Christ. Jesus invites us to intentional living – a response to God’s grace – so we will grow into new selves. We will wear new clothes, imitating the ways of Jesus: love, holiness, kindness, patience, grace.

St. Paul writes about this change in Ephesians saying: ‘You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, ...and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.’ (4:22-24)

And in Galatians 3: ‘As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.’ (3:27)

People of God, we’ve already been clothed in Jesus Christ’s abundant grace. The question is, what garments of the heart will we chose each day to honor Him? Amen.

ⁱ William Barclay. The Gospel of Matthew: Volume 2. The Westminster Press. Philadelphia, PA. 1975. Pg. 269-270.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jul/16/indiana-sarah-cummins-wedding-party-homeless>