

“Dress Code”

Matthew 22:1-14

October 15, 2017

“...he saw there was a man with no wedding garment...the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness...’”

Matthew 22:11-13

You know, I’ve been thinking...and, I know you’re glad to hear that...I’ve been thinking that maybe we should consider introducing a dress code. Yes, you heard me, a dress code, here at College Church. What do you think? Well, of course you agree.

Especially, I believe, a dress code is needed for our young people. And, mind you, when an old, retired pastor says, “young people,” he means 40 on down.

Don’t you think it would be nice to see all our young ladies in nice dresses and all our young men in a coat and tie every Sunday? Wouldn’t that be nice? Well, ‘course it would. Just look around. There’s room for improvement.

You know, when I was a boy, wearing your “Sunday best” actually meant something. What it meant was getting dressed-up in the most uncomfortable clothes I had, wearing a tie and stiff shoes and a sport coat that was either too large because I was supposed to grow into it, or it was too small because I already had. But, you know, there was something to be said for that.

Mostly what I said was, “I sure am glad church is over so I can change out of these stupid clothes.” Well, of course, kids are going to say that, but that doesn’t mean a dress code might just be a pretty darn good idea.

Did you know that the Bible says there should be a dress code? Yes, indeed, this morning’s Gospel lesson is in part about a dress code. In fact, in Jesus’ day, not being properly attired for whatever the occasion could get you into a whole lot of trouble!

The Gospel story is about a king who had invited everybody, who was anybody, to a big wedding feast for his son, a very special occasion to be sure.

But everyone he invited had one flimsy excuse or another why they couldn’t make it. In fact, some of them even treated the king’s servants who brought them the invitation in terrible ways!

So, the king made short work of those who refused his invitation and he told his servants to go out on the street and invite anyone they could find, be they good or bad.

When everyone was assembled, the king noticed that one of these newly invited guests was not properly attired. He had no “wedding garment.” Hence, the poor fellow was bound hand and foot and thrown out! I’ve always felt badly for that poor guy because surely not everyone who was invited at the last minute had the proper attire; there were probably a lot of poor people among them. In fact, in Luke’s version of this parable some of them were even blind and handicapped! One could hardly expect that everyone would have a dinner jacket at the ready!

Ah, but in those days things were done a little differently than they are now: ***the wedding garment was provided at the door by the one throwing the banquet.*** This made everyone equal in the sight of the king and of one another. No rich people prancing about, showing off their splendid attire while others of lesser means were

ashamed in their common clothes. Every guest at the banquet was an equal and all were invited to enjoy the banquet equally, no person judging another by his outward appearance.

As Robert Smith puts it in his commentary on Matthew, "*Matthew is tireless in warning that judging others is not the business of the community.*"¹

So, *presumably*, the man who had no wedding garment had *refused to put one on* when it was offered to him at the door, thinking he was quite adequately attired without it, thinking he had no need of it.

Now, of course, this story is not most importantly about a wedding banquet. Jesus introduces the story by saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast..."

And the wedding garment is a piece of clothing only in the sense that Paul talks about putting on the "clothing" of righteousness,² dressing in the "**garment of grace**," if you will.

The "wedding garment" might be best understood in the way that Luther described what it is that Christ has done for us. Luther would hold up his fist and say, "This is you and me, naked, a rebellious fist shaken before God in all our sinfulness. We cannot hide our sinfulness from God and God cannot tolerate our sinfulness in his presence." Then, he would pull out a white handkerchief and throw it over his fist and say, "This is what Christ has done for us! He has covered our sinfulness with his own **sinlessness**, so that we may enter into the presence of God."

When God looks down upon us, he sees not our sinfulness, but only the **sinlessness** of his own Son!

This is what forgiveness looks like!

This is what grace looks like!

This is how we are to dress when invited to the banquet!

Guests who refuse the wedding garment are like those who refuse Christ's sacrifice for them, who think they have no need of it. That wedding guest thought he was quite good enough as he was and had no need of what Christ had done for him. And **that** is why he was thrown out of the banquet and out of the kingdom!

Yes, oh yes, I think we need a **dress code** at College Church, but not one that has to do with dresses, ties and coats. (All the "kids" here-under 40-may be relieved).

We need that "wedding garment," that "**garment of grace**," which allows God to look upon us, seeing *not* our sinfulness, but only the righteousness of his own Son in whose honor he throws a banquet *today, right here, right now*, and invites us all to come, to eat, to drink, *dressed in the **garment of God's grace!***

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¹ Smith, Robert, Matthew, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament, p. 258.

² Ephesians 6:14, I Thessalonians 5:8