

“BUT WHEN THE KING CAME IN TO LOOK AT THE GUESTS, HE SAW THERE A MAN WHO HAD NO WEDDING GARMENT. AND HE SAID TO HIM, ‘FRIEND, HOW DID YOU GET IN HERE WITH A WEDDING SPEECHLESS?’”

How sure are you that you are safe? Consider this for a minute. Let's say you are finally able to purchase your dream sail boat and set out to sail, all alone, across the ocean. Even if you are a good swimmer, you probably would want to make sure you wear a life preserver, just in case, right? You go hunting in North Dakota, you want to wear your blaze orange, just to be safe. You have to go outside in a good North Dakota blizzard, probably don't want to venture out wearing your bathing suit. Probably a good idea to put on your parka, to be safe, right?

So, how do you know you are safe to appear before the judgment seat of God? After all, the Bible says, *for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Co 5:10)*. Well, My Friends in Christ, our parable answers that question for us this morning.

The wedding garment is the main focus of this parable this morning. Let me be clear: the wedding garment is the righteousness of Jesus Christ. And the warning for us is not to foolishly believe we can enter into the wedding feast thinking wearing our own righteousness. You cannot enter the wedding feast of the Lamb in heaven without wearing the righteousness of Jesus. So I ask you: How are we clothed in this wedding garment? How are we sure that we are safe?

Our parable picks up on the parable last week. Remember the parable of the tenants, where the wicked tenants killed the servants and killed the Son, and so the field was taken from them and given to someone

else? In the parable before us this morning, Jesus switches from the picture of a vineyard to the picture of a wedding. The imagery of a wedding runs throughout the Bible. We can understand a wedding – it is a something special; it is joyful.

With that imagery of the wedding, the Bible is continually teaching us that Christ is our Bridegroom, and the Church is His bride. I remind you that our Lord's first miracle was at the wedding at Cana, turning water into wine. With that miracle, the Savior is teaching us that Bridegroom has come to His bride! And the book of Revelation says, *Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Re 19:9).*

In the parable before us, the invitations are sent out. The dinner is prepared, the oxen and fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. *"Come to the feast."* The problem, of course, is that people don't want to come; they have other priorities, things more important than the wedding feast. And when one man shows up, he thinks he is good enough to wear his own garments.

Maybe we could think of it this way: You are invited to a wedding. There is the bride, wearing a white wedding dress; and I'm guessing there's a few of you who know what those cost. And all over that white gown is used motor oil. Mustard and ketchup. Red wine and spaghetti sauce. And the bride would say, "Don't I look beautiful?" And you would say ... ?

My Friends, that gives you an idea of what we look like before God in the shame and guilt of our sin. The Prophet Isaiah says it with these words, *We have all become like on who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment (Is 64:6).*

And we cannot hide the shame and guilt of our sin before God. That's why we confess,

... that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

II. But the Good News for us, My Friends, is that the Bridegroom has come to His bride.

You will recall that at the Baptism of Jesus, the Savior comes to be baptized and John tried to prevent Him. But Jesus answers, *Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness (Mt 3:15, NIV)*.

Jesus was, in His baptism, taking the place of us poor, miserable sinners in order to our sins to the cross. He is that Lamb that suffers and dies for us, so that we are forgiven, washed clean in His blood.

And there's something else the Savior did for us. On the 8th day of His earthly life, He was circumcised to place Himself under the Law, and perfectly keep it for us, because we could not. Allow me to flesh that out for you using the example of the 1st Commandment, we are to fear, love, and trust in God above all things. But, we worry, stew, fret, and are anxious. So Jesus perfectly kept the 1st Commandment – and to be clear all the Commandments. He perfectly feared, loved, and trusted in God above all things. And He did it for us, so that His perfect keeping of the Law is credited to you. His perfect righteousness is your perfect righteousness.

Which brings us back to the wedding garments in our parable this morning.

In the ancient world, especially when you went into the palace to enter into the presence of the king, the king himself would provide you the appropriate clothes. The Persian kings, for example, would have warehouses full of robes and garments for this very reason.

You could never afford a garment that had enough splendor and beauty to go into the king's presence. Here's the point: the king himself had to make you ready. And so it is for us, for you and for me. If we are going to appear before God in His holiness, He has to clothe us; He has to provide the garment.

This shouldn't surprise us because God is doing this very thing throughout the Scriptures. Remember Adam and Eve knew they were naked and hid from God? And God clothed them in the skin of the sacrifice. Remember when Noah got off the ark, and he planted a vineyard and got drunk on the wine? There he lay naked in his tent, so his sons took a garment walked backwards to cover the nakedness of their father.

III. God covers you. I remind you again: The Old Testament points to the cross. When God clothes Adam and Eve and Noah, He is pointing us to Christ. And clothing you is exactly what God did at your baptism

St. Paul writes, *For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (Ga 3:27)*. In the new birth of our baptism, we are given the righteousness of Christ to wear so that it "covers over" all the filth and shame of our sin. God looks at us and does not see our sin anymore. He sees only the righteousness of Christ. That means for you, Dear Child of God, you are perfectly clothed for the wedding feast of the Lamb. The hymnwriter of old said it this way,

When He shall come with trumpet sound,
Oh, may I then in Him be found,
Clothed in His righteousness alone,
redeemed to stand before His throne (*LSB 575:4*).

It is good for us to remember that because we daily sin much; we break the Commandments of God. Instead of loving our neighbor, we've hurt our neighbor. And our sin is ever before us. And, we are hurt by

others' sin. You were wronged. Someone lied about you. Someone mocked you. Someone abused you. Someone neglected you. This world just has a way of beating us up, reminding us that we don't measure up.

And the result is that now not only are we carrying the guilt and shame of our sin, we're carrying the hurt, the frustration, the disappointment of the sins committed against us. And all of this makes us feel unworthy, unworthy to appear before the Lord, unworthy to stand in His presence. We become fearful and afraid to approach the throne of God.

I've said before and I say again: I believe the challenge for every Christian is to see ourselves as God sees us. Don't let Satan with his lies or this world make you forget that God takes the perfection of Christ and clothes you in it so that you are covered in His righteousness, His beauty, His glory, so that you belong here, you have a place at the wedding feast.

And you are at that wedding feast, right now, here today. The feast is the Son's lifegiving Body and Blood itself, for forgiveness, life and salvation. This is the foretaste of the feast that will never end.

And clothed in this righteousness, you are beautiful. You are perfectly adorned for the wedding feast of the Lamb. There's nothing lacking. You are safe to stand before His throne.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.