

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Recently within our nation's hallowed halls of governing, there has been a decision by a senator and the majority leader of the House, to relax the Senate's dress code and allow members to enter the chamber in casual attire, or even gym clothes. This decision has prompted spirited debate and incited waves of dismay within the chamber and within our culture. But, here within this house of the wedding feast we call the holy church, I think we would stand in direct conflict with the king today within this parable before us and quickly say with little debate and dismay that there is *no* dress code, come as you are.

Now before we begin to parse out this parable and unleash our angst on this king, please listen to the words of St. Paul writing to his beloved Timothy. In this letter to Timothy, Paul provides guidance for Timothy as he addresses the problems of church administration and false teaching of a speculative and moralistic type that was taking place within the church at Ephesus. St. Paul writes this:

³ I urge you, as I did when I was on my way to Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus so that you may instruct certain people not to teach any different doctrine, ⁴ and not to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies that promote speculations rather than the divine training that is known by faith. ⁵ But the aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. ⁶ Some people have deviated from these and turned to meaningless talk, ⁷ desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions. (1 Timothy 1:3-7)

I would, as Paul writes, be deviating from the teaching of Jesus Christ within this parable and turning to meaningless talk, without understanding what Jesus is saying if I were to tell you that there is *NO* dress code or that this king is vile and just dead wrong. I too, like most folks when initially reading or hearing this parable am somewhat confused by the disjointed details and offended by this king's behavior and misuse of power and authority simply because his ego gets bruised.

The parable begins by telling us that a king invites folks into a feast, they don't come. In his anger and dare I say, his embarrassment, the king destroys the people and burns down the very city where this banquet is to take place. Take notice, all of this happens while the meal is set out and waiting for people to come and partake of it. Of course, we could hastily claim the king is justified due to the killing of some of the slaves that were sent out. Nevertheless, after that, he instructs his slaves to go out again and get anybody they can, good or bad, to come into the banquet. Now at this point in the parable...lord knows how long this food has been sitting out. No matter though, the people are gathered in and after all this, the king has the audacity to condemn someone who is not dressed properly.

Here before us today in this parable sits a bunch of people who have just had their very existence turned upside down, burned down, murdered, and destroyed...they are being invited to eat food that has been sitting out for lord only knows how long, and the king is angered because of what one person is or isn't wearing. Listen again to what the Gospel says;

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.' (Matt 22:11-13)

Now before we pass judgment on the king, let's look at the bigger picture. I mention some things in this parable that just don't make sense such as the burning of the city and the food that is set out for what seems a long time. There are so many other discrepancies as far as time and logic that just don't line up in this parable. They don't line up because this is an allegorical parable...meaning this story, or this parable is taught or told this way in order to reveal a hidden meaning, or a much deeper moral or political meaning.

The parable is presented to cause us to look not so much at the things mentioned or the logic of them but rather how they direct us to a bigger picture. In other words, this is not a story to be taken literally or understood through the details, the meaning is hidden within the literal things presented and mentioned.

So in the parable Jesus begins with a king inviting people into a royal wedding feast for his son, it says wedding feast but it is actually a great supper that the folks are invited into. Very simply put, the king is not a king it is God and the Son is of course Jesus and we are the ones invited into this feast that has been set out for us. Being invited in encourages us to think about how God invites us in and what that is to look like in the lives of those who listen and consider this parable. We all at one time or another have put God's invite into worship behind things in our life that we claim take precedence over church. The feast itself, or the wedding banquet is of course the feast that is set before the bride, the church and bride groom, Jesus Christ. This wedding feast is our Holy Eucharist that was set out the night in which Jesus was betrayed and it is the very bread and wine that sets before us right now. We all have been invited...we all have put that invite off, but the invite like the parable itself gathers us into something much greater as well.

St John teaches us of a greater invite in his first epistle. St. John explains God's invitation this way, that the one who loves is born of God and knows God. And this love that we are able to share with one another is how we know God. But St. John is quick to say that this love is NOT because we've loved God, rather this love is known and shared among us because God loved us and made that obvious by sending His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sin. Through Jesus Christ we know and believe the love God has for us. And we know that...God is love, and any who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. (*1 John 4:7-16*)

This love that John tells us about is the love that we have been called into, rather *invited* into through the Waters of our Baptism. This love is what we are all invited into in this worship this morning. All are invited into this Eucharistic banquet, the good and the bad as the parable tell us this morning.

In Baptism we remember that we are liberated from sin and death. We remember also that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ. But also let us not forget that we are CLOTHED in the righteousness of Christ. Or as St. Paul informed the Galatians:

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

So one could say that in this Eucharistic Banquet, like the banquet in the parable, there is a “dress-code.” This “dress-code” defines us, it is who we are as Baptized Christians. We are Baptized...we have been clothed in God’s love and righteousness. Knowing this then, do we say nothing at all? Do we even go as far as remove these garments that God has clothed us in by putting on our own self-righteousness or by putting on our own self-justification? We are all sent, but can what God has clothed us in be seen beyond these walls, or do we do nothing or say nothing like the man does in this parable when asked, how did he get into the banquet without a wedding robe?

Remembering that in our Baptism we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ...may we remember also that we are told to do something:

“Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

May our faith then light the darkness of this world that we are sent into so that Christ may be revealed in it. Like it or not, there is a dress code and it is called faith...faith...that is what God Himself has clothed us in when we were Baptized.

In that faith and love there is a fidelity and responsibility and that responsibility becomes the manifestation of that faith in the world around us and towards other we encounter in this world.

Now before anyone begins to think that I am saying that you must “dress” a certain way or that there are certain things one must do, listen again to what St. John has said...God’s love for us is NOT because we loved God, rather this love is known and shared among us because God loved us and made that obvious by sending His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sin.

This love is what we vest or clothe ourselves in as we face the divisive darkness of chaos that is our current culture. The effect of God’s love and gracious activity that we have been clothed in is a positive light that shines against the darkness of negativity of the chaos, the ruthlessness, and the unbelief of our culture. The effects of God’s love is our faith...a faith that needs no words but is seen as the vestments or clothing of humility, truth, integrity, and decency.¹

Despite what the culture demands us to wear, through the waters of our Baptism, we are vested in God’s love and joy, not just when we die, but as we live now. Despite what we face in our everyday lives we are still loved by God. Despite the challenges and struggles that shroud and darken our lives we are loved by God. Despite all that we face...may we know the joy of God’s love for us.

¹ Keck, Leander, senior editor. *NIB, The New Interpreter’s Bible, A Commentary in Twelve Volumes. Volume VI Introduction To Prophetic Literature: The Book of Isaiah, The Book of Jeremiah, The Book of Baruch, The Letter of Jeremiah, The Book of Lamentations, The Book of Ezekiel.* The commentary on Isaiah 25:1-12 helped me find my words while using some of Gene M. Tucker’s commentary on pages 216 -218.

Today in this worship...we are reminded once again our Lord God has vested us in His love for us and through the Holy Spirit has invited us into this heavenly banquet. In this Holy Banquet that is set before us this day, may we be reminded that it is Jesus Christ who has removed the shroud of death that no longer clothes us. God has clothed us with light and life...whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, God has vested us all in it by wedding us all to his Son Jesus Christ...this is the dress code that defines us at this Holy Banquet...or this Holy Eucharist. If there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, we have received and have been vested by God in Christ Jesus...this is the dress code that does not hinder us or cast us away, rather it is the dress code that saves us and defines us all at this Holy Banquet.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.