

WHAT ARE YOU WEARING?

When we hear today's reading from Philippians telling us not to be anxious about **anything**. Then in Matthew a guest is thrown out because of his clothes he is wearing!!! One of our first thoughts is likely; "I thought God is more concerned with our inner thoughts, attitudes, and sincerity than our outward appearance, especially our clothes!" So how do we explain these verses when a friend asks "I thought your God was so loving and His Son so compassionate!" For this culture and sadly many Christians the problem lies in the fact we take so much from what we see, from the surface if you will, instead of taking some time to discover what is below that surface, what is beyond that which we are seeing.

We have all at one time or another tried our hand at looking over images that are meant to trick our eyes and mind, such as that line with those arrows and we are sure the line is longer on one of the images than the other. However, when the line is measured it is exactly the same length. The Bible has been used by some in the exact same way by taking verses out of context among the most abused methods. Like today's story could be taken out of context and used to say "if you wear the wrong clothes" God will punish you" and you know God is especially hard on the ladies!

We will fall victim to such abuse of the word of God if we do not take the time to study the word and know the meaning behind the words and story. That is why we have Bible studies, and gather on Sunday morning to hear the word.

One cult I have had experience with draws upon verses in 1 and 2 Corinthians regarding three levels of heaven and how by works we can achieve the highest, and becoming God-like. When one reads and studies these verses we find back in Paul's time there was quite the discussion from people who questioned the whole idea of resurrection and then another group of people who were curious about how the body would look, etc. upon resurrection. The point is we cannot just glance at the Bible and develop a "surface belief". Why? Because when someone comes to us with questions, we can have an answer. It may not be the one they want to hear, but we are to "**speak the truth in love**". I would not venture to say the number of people Christianity has lost because a word was spoken in haste, without love or misused.

That brings us to today's story in Matthew. On the surface a king is going to have a wedding party, invites guests, they don't come and then he has servants go and invite anyone who will come to the party. Sounds good, but then the king finds one such guest

not in wedding clothes and throws him out. What just happened? I thought he was invited. One of facts behind this story is that the king would have provided wedding clothes for the guests and you wore the clothes out of respect for who invited you.

Now let's look even deeper into this story and how we can apply its meaning to us today, in fact to each and every day of our life. This book, the Bible, is meant to be a "living" manual for us as a disciple of Jesus Christ. With the help of the Holy Spirit we can find meaning in these words of the Bible, the living word. These are not just words written way back long ago and irrelevant today. By no means, if anything it is just as relevant today as back then!

We can certainly see others in the guests invited to the party, and if we take a second look we can see ourselves too! It is widely accepted that the king is God himself, the guests are people invited by God to receive salvation and people's reaction to the invitation. This is the basic meaning, however, there is even more to take from the story.

I asked the question "what are you wearing?" That question goes far beyond clothes. We can "wear" many things. You know people who are very approachable, because they "wear" love, humility, empathy, and many more "clothes" that a disciple of Jesus Christ puts on in gratitude to a loving, merciful, and compassionate God, who gave us all the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ! Remember through grace we deserve none of this.

Another point is we cannot buy the "right" clothing; it is given by God just as the king gave his guests the wedding clothes. We can't really find in the story why the one guest did not take up the king's offer, but as we know many do not "take up" God's offer of salvation.

Earlier in the story the king had invited guests, sent out servants to tell them everything is ready and the verse says "they did not want to come". Then these guests went out to do various, it seems, trivial tasks – tending a garden, working in their shop. Now the question comes for us. When God comes calling, how do we respond? What things do we go and find to occupy our time? What self-serving, self-centered things can we find for an excuse not to "attend" the party?

A disciple by very definition is **disciplined!!!!** Jesus followed God's will and I can safely say I believe after three years of trying to bring the message to Israel Jesus was tired, but He went to the cross for us anyway. Jesus had likely grown weary of working with the disciples, and even more so with the religious establishment of the day, but never did He miss an opportunity to engage them.

Do **we** fill our response vocabulary with answers like "I can't", "I don't have time", "I won't work with", "and I'm just too tired". Just like the people in the story where are our priorities? What are our priorities?

We have voted to go forward and explore expanding various parts of the church facilities. We will need many of you to serve, give insight, wisdom, and likely even some labor. Will we be like the guests and go off doing other things?

Belonging to a community of faith is a choice, but once you have made that commitment; there is a responsibility to the community. Now will there be times you cannot fulfill that commitment? Certainly! Maybe I am not a realist, but I do not believe that the 80/20 rule has to be some kind of "standard". You know 20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the work? Each community of faith is unique, certainly Centennial is!!! When a committee comes asking for your help, your participation, don't walk off. In serving no matter what committee or task around the church there is a blessing in it, and you know serving is a way to help us to grow, don't miss that opportunity!

"Never make excuses. Your friends don't need them and your foes won't believe them."

Not managing your time and making excuses are two bad habits. Don't put them both together by claiming you 'don't have the time'.

Now you notice when the king confronted the wedding guest not wearing the wedding clothes and asked the guest about his presence the guest was speechless. And there were consequences for his rebellion. I would assume that when the disciples heard this or others around listening to Jesus speak were taken aback. Are we? It is fine to hear all about the love, grace, and mercy of God, but we don't want to hear about being a just God and consequences. Life is full of cause and effect – if you violate a law you likely somewhere, some day will get a ticket.

Are God's laws any less accountable for you? We can try to hide under the covers of love, grace, and mercy or we can repent and ask forgiveness but how many Christians "wear" sin and never take it off by asking forgiveness? When we are asked by someone about that which we are "wearing" are we speechless? Do we have an answer or do we dare to make an excuse?

Don't we desire that if someone comes asking that we are wearing the right clothes? You ask, what are the "right" clothes? In the Epistle reading there is an answer. "if anything is

excellent, is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things, all that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, and all that is worthy of praise, and the promise – the God of peace will be with you. When we pray about such things in the earlier verse it says “the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus”. Do we believe it? If we believe it, then the question is, why “wear” any other clothing?

Here is a beautiful verse about the clothing ...

Isaiah 61:3 ... to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.

Going back to our story the wedding garment, conspicuous and distinctive, given by the king, who symbolizes God represents a person's righteousness or holiness. It symbolizes the habit of sincerity, repentance, humility, and obedience. The wedding garment replaces the street clothes that stand for the habits of pride, rebellion, and sinfulness. Biblically, beautiful clothing indicates spiritual character developed by submission to God. Paul exhorts Christians to "put on the lord Jesus Christ" like a garment (romans 13:14). Clothing, then, represents a Christ-covered life, and as a result, character ("clothing") consistent with God's way of life.

Again the question as God invites us to live in the kingdom, what are you wearing? Will we have on the clothes that demonstrate that we indeed have accepted his invitation and choose to live a life in Christ? In closing here is a request to God i pray we all make...

*May our hearts remain open to God's love.
May our minds remain open to God's will.
May our doors remain open to God's hospitality.
So that all hearts may feel loved, all minds may have God's direction, and
all doors that separate and divide, may be torn down.
In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...Amen.*