

Sermon for Sunday – October 15, 2017  
Matthew 22:1-14

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O God, our strength and our redeemer.

There used to be a little joke around the church office in regards to the way Darren, our office administrator and way Rev. Ron dressed – you see nine times out of ten – they would both arrive at work wearing the same coloured plaid shirt. They were like twins - it was adorable and a little bit funny. But the other day as I stood in front of my closet trying to figure out what to wear to the office it dawned on me. How hard was it really for Darren and Ron to be dressed alike after all don't most men only have three or four shirts – it seems to me that the odds were pretty good that they would be dressed alike - in fact the really amazing thing would be for them to be dressed differently.

Maybe I am wrong about men wardrobe choices for men, maybe both men and women share the same dilemma – what to wear. Do you stand in front of your closet and wonder? Did you wonder this morning about what to wear as you got ready for worship? Did you make your kids try again?

For the most part I think we dress comfortably here, some a little more formal than others but for the most part folks seem accepting of whatever people choose to wear – mostly we are just glad to be together. Perhaps this is why this morning's scripture lesson of the under-dressed wedding guest is just a bit hard to hear. After all what did the king expect? If you are going to go out into the streets and recruit guests at the last minute, how can you expect them to be wearing the right cloths? With all due respect to the king – either give them time to go home and change or lower your standards. No one walks around in wedding robes, just in case they happen to be invited to a royal banquet.

Now, some scholars say that it would have been the wedding host who provided wedding garments for their guest in those days, the same way some fancy restaurants keep spare suit jackets and ties on hand for dinner guest who show up in shirt sleeves. If that was the case, then the spotlight shifts from the king to the guest. Why did he refuse the robe that was offered him? What made him think he could come as he was to such an auspicious feast without being noticed?

Either way, this is no ordinary story. I would suggest it is an elaborate allegory in which everything has a deeper meaning. Our first clue is the opening line. "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son." Think about it for a minute a king held a banquet for his son – God had a son - I wonder who the son in this story might be.

Our second clue that this is a story with a deeper meaning is the outrageousness of the plot. How many people do you know murder the postal worker for delivering a wedding invitation? And how likely is it that a wedding banquet would stay warm while a king mobilized his troops, declared war, and burned a whole city to the ground? By the time all that had happened, the roast beef would be seriously overdone. It is clear to me that we are dealing with a story that is pointing to something deeper.

And then there is the story behind the story. Which was Jesus' disappointment, and Matthew, after him, his disappointment that so few of God's people were responding to the invitation to celebrate with God's son. Few were RSVP ing to the invitation to live as the son had invited. The prophets had invited them, but some of them had killed the prophets. Then, in 70 AD, Jerusalem was sacked by Rome. The temple was demolished right down to its retaining walls, which some interpreted as fire from heaven. Then, largely through the efforts of Saint Paul, the Jewish community of Christ's followers was opened to Gentiles – the second shift of invited guests – and a new controversy set in.

The latecomers – The Gentiles who had no history with the God of Israel – acted as if grace gave them permission to live any way they wanted to. Meanwhile, the old-timers – the Hebrews who had known God forever - were still trying to figure out what it meant for them to be free from the old law.

Pretty soon, the early church had a discipline problem on its hands, as believers bellied up to God's table with no sense of what it meant for them to be there. As far as they were concerned, you showed up in God's presence however you wanted to show up, because Jesus was like that – loving you as you are. The invitation to the heavenly banquet was “come as you are.” All were welcome and nothing was required: no fancy clothes, no etiquette, no RSVP, no gratitude for being invited.

Matthew said to his congregation through this story – that they were wrong. Being an invited guest does not mean you may do as you please. Being invited at the last minute does not mean anything goes. People of God! You have been invited to feast with the king! You must rise to the occasion!

The under-dressed wedding guest got bounced because he would not do that. Maybe he thought the king was lucky he came at all. Maybe he thought he was doing his host a favour by showing up to eat food that might otherwise have gone to waste, in which case he was seriously mistaken about who was doing a favour for whom. Whatever his logic, he did not rise to the occasion. Instead, he demeaned it, by refusing to change. And I'm not talking about clothes, here.

Like everything else in this story, the wedding robe has a deeper meaning. It is not a white linen tunic embroidered with gold thread. It is a whole way of life – one that honours the king, one that recognized the privilege of being called into his presence, even if the invitation arrives at the last minute. The under-dressed guest's mistake was not that he showed up in shorts. It was that he showed up short on gratitude, humility and respect and thought no one would notice, least of all the king.///

On the one hand, this is a story that addressed a very particular situation in the life of the early church on the other hand I think it holds a very important message for us in this time and place.//

Sometimes I think we are the under-dressed guest, some of us show up in our lives with our spiritual shirttails hanging out, lining up at the buffet table as if no one could see the ways in which we too have refused to change – refusing to surrender our way to God's way, refusing to let go of our resentments and to live with grace, refusing to see the need of others and to live generously, refusing to respect the dignity of every human being and live with respect. These are the old clothes we wear to the king's banquet – instead of the cloths of new life.

I think sometimes we think that all the king is looking for is warm bodies and not transformed lives. But I am of the opinion that God is not looking for warm bodies. God is looking for wedding guests, who will rise to the occasion of honouring the son. We can do that in shorts and running shoes, just as well as we can do it in suits and high heels, because our wedding robes are not made out of denim or silk. They are made from the whole fabric of our lives, using patterns God has given us – patterns of justice, forgiveness, loving-kindness, peace. When we stitch them up and put them on we are gorgeous, absolutely gorgeous.

Amen.

**Matthew 22:1-14**

22Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: <sup>2</sup>“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. <sup>3</sup>He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. <sup>4</sup>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.’ <sup>5</sup>But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, <sup>6</sup>while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. <sup>7</sup>The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. <sup>8</sup>Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. <sup>9</sup>Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, <sup>12</sup>and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. <sup>13</sup>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.’ <sup>14</sup>For many are called, but few are chosen.”