

Matthew 22:1-14
No R.S.V.P. on this Invitation 2020

It's remarkable how long-time married couples communicate. Take this situation. Hubby comes home after work and gets ready to go out with his wife for the evening. He paws through the closet not sure what to wear while his wife waits in the living room. He gets changed and comes out of the bedroom ready to go.

His wife looks at him and smiles. Not the "darling I love you" smile, but a polite smile. And then she says just 5 words: "*Is that what you're wearing?*" And husbands, you know the answer to that question. You immediately return to the bedroom and change clothes.

This morning, Jesus tells a story about clothing - what to wear and wearing wrong thing. It's a parable with a disturbing ending, but an important lesson for life in the kingdom of God. Let's look at the parable.

Jesus is in the temple courtyard area teaching. While he's teaching, he sees a contingent coming forward to investigate. It's the chief priests and Pharisees who have come to do a little religious heckling. But Jesus addresses them: *The Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast for his son. He sent his servant to call those who were invited to the marriage feast;''*

Now I don't know that anyone listening to Jesus that parable could imagine attending a King's Wedding banquet. No social event was more lavish. The King would pull out all the stops for his son.

Even today, rich fathers impress their peers with the wedding banquets they throw for their daughters. Bernie Ecclestone was the British billionaire and a business magnet. The wedding that he threw for his daughter, Petra, was held in a 15th century castle just outside Rome. The night before the wedding, 350 guests enjoyed caviar and Crystal champagne as they were entertained by Alicia Keyes. The next day, the bride walked down the aisle in a \$130,000 Vera Wang dress and while Andrea Bocelli serenaded her. At the reception, guests sipped Chateau Petras wine at \$6,500/bottle while listening to Eric Clapton perform.

The total tab for the wedding, \$5,000,000. That's beyond anything we could imagine. In Jesus day, the wedding banquet that a king would throw would exceed the imagination of those who stood there listening.

Here's the point. Some think the Christian life boring, not fun, too confining But notice the analogy Jesus uses Jesus was not describing heaven. He was describing life lived in God's realm, in the Kingdom of Heaven.

It's not like working on a farm. It's not like tending to the commerce of working in a shop. Life lived in God's realm is like attending a King's wedding banquet. Who wouldn't leap at such an invitation? BUT.....there's a problem that comes up in this parable.

The king sends his servants out with invitations to the elite.. It's a great honor to be invited to a King's banquet More than an honor: A command

In Middle Eastern culture, the invitation is a two-step process. The Host sends out invitations and receives acceptances Then he decides on the meat to be served, depending on the number of acceptances For 2-4, he kills a chicken or two For 35-75 he'll butcher a calf The kind and amount of the food is based on acceptances

Then he sends the servants with the second invitation at The Hour of Banquet "*Come, all is now ready.*" No RSVP on this invite. Having accepted the first invitation, you're duty bound to appear. It's this second invitation that Jesus speaks of in the parable.

Look how they respond. "They make light of it." They are preoccupied with their livelihoods, farms, businesses Some were hostile and killed the servants. Jesus was speaking to the Chief Priests and Pharisees. He was speaking to those who spurned the prophets that God had sent. He was speaking to those would to kill the Son.

How would you respond? The King's Response is not surprising. He punishes the rebellious ones – that's understandable. But, then he does something that's unexpected The King does not postpone the party. He doesn't call it off. Instead, He opens the party to everyone He tells his servants: *Go into the streets and bring everyone! The good and the bad!*

That's good news for all of us this morning. Jesus is speaking allegorically – symbolically. God the King invited Israel, his Chosen People. It was an exclusive list. None of us were on it. The servants sent out were the prophets. But time and again, for one reason or another, the religious hierarchy rejected God's call and killed his prophets.

So God opened the invitation to everyone else No prerequisites. All are invited: Good and Bad.. But then there was this little incident. Someone showed up without the proper attire.

At the end WWII – the Russian head of state gave banquet to honor Churchill. All of the Russians showed up in their best formal wear – military dress uniforms. But Churchill thought he would provide nostalgic touch. So he showed up wearing the zipper coveralls he had worn during German bomb attack in London

The Russians were humiliated and insulted. That's because the way a person comes to anything demonstrates the spirit in which he comes.

By God's grace, we have been invited to a great banquet hosted by the King of Heaven. We really did nothing to merit the invitation. It's his grace that gets us in the door. Now how will we respond to his gracious invitation?

Some would say, it doesn't matter because I'm saved by grace. I can show up in jeans and flip flops. But that's not what this parable says. To stay at this banquet certain attire is required that honors the host.

Christianity is a minority religion. By that I mean, many are called, but few are chosen. To be called it to take up that invitation from the gracious king. But to be chosen is something more than just showing up. To be chosen is to persevere to the end – to don garments honoring our host.

What are those wedding garments? What do they symbolize in the parable? The parable leaves it unanswered.

Augustine said that the garments are love. Those who are called are also called to live their lives in love of God and in love of one another. Do we live our lives loving God and one another? Do we bear fruit for the Lord? Or do we accept the Lord's invitation and just go on living as we always have in our jeans and flip flops?

Martin Luther said the garment is faith. When judgment day comes, many who call themselves Christian will lack faith and will be cast into outer darkness. Without faith, no one can remain at the Wedding Banquet. What was that man in jeans and flip flops lacking at the King's banquet: Faith or Fruit from his life?

Perhaps Calvin reconciles the two best when he says: *"There is no point in arguing about the marriage garment, whether it is faith or a holy and godly life; for faith cannot be separated from good works and good works proceed only from faith."*

What is clear is that Christ calls us – just as we are. But he does not call us to a stagnant life. He calls us to a new life, to a transformed life.

If we are to remain in the Lord's house, the old man must go. We don the marriage garments, we make the effort. We strive for righteousness. We reach out to others in love.

We shine those shoes, we press the pants, and we do it joyfully because we want to honor the host. And, let's face it, we will look a lot better in our banquet garments than jeans and flip flops.

What you do in this life matters. The outreach you demonstrate matters to God. The forgiveness you grant counts with God. The discipline you exercise for holy living is noticed by God. And when you show up for Sunday service, you show your gratitude to a gracious God.

How we live matters to God. Don't **tire** of doing good. Don't grow **weary** of living righteously. Don't **give up** forgiving those who don't deserve your forgiveness.

Because when you do these things,. You are honoring the king. It's the wedding garment you wear to his banquet.

I'm told that Melania Trump's wedding dress cost \$50, 000. But to attend the King's banquet, you will have to put on something for more costly than what Melania wore.

You will have to put on garments of the mind and of the heart and of the soul. The garment of humble penitence. The garment of faith. The garment of reverence. The garment of expectation.

In short, you'll have to put on Christ.