

Dear Friends in Christ,

I read about a minister who preached an outstanding sermon on the Lord's return. Some students approached him after the service and said, "We can't get that out of the New Testament the way you preached it." "Of course you can't get it out," he replied, "it's in there to stay!"

I've heard people, church people who know Christ as Savior, express a bit of fear of that moment of Christ's return. I suspect it's because of our on-going struggle with sin and, consequently, our unworthiness, or, maybe, it's because we try to justify things we know we can't justify before God. The reality of His unannounced return can shake the foundation a bit.

It's a struggle, isn't it? We turn to Paul's words of struggle: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin." (Rom. 7:24,25) The struggle is always there!

This Sunday we're examining . . .

DRESSED AND READY TO GO!

I. A Parable to Remember. Matt. 22:1-14.

Our Gospel lesson is The Parable of the Wedding Feast. In the Parable Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come." (vv. 2,3) The people first invited is a reference to the Jews. After refusing, the Gentiles are invited. The king said, "The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find." (vv. 8,9) We're told, "And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests." (v. 10)

It is understood that the bad and good who were invited to the wedding feast were given wedding garments. All but one. We're told, "And the king said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?'" (v. 12) The man had no explanation and the king said to his attendants, "Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen." (vv. 13,14)

Two points here. First, it has been noted that "a foretaste of this (wedding) feast is offered to us in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper." Second, we are to remember that those who are invited to the feast are unworthy of the invitation but made worthy by the one inviting them. In their commentary on St. Matthew's Gospel, the Albrecht's write the following:

(The king) sent his servants out into the streets to invite anyone they could find. This is the evangelistic mission of the church, which began already on Good Friday as the penitent thief and the Roman centurion were moved to confess their faith in Jesus... Every sinner who receives this invitation in penitent faith must confess together with Martin Luther, "I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel." (Albrecht's, The People's Bible Commentary, Matthew, CPH, 1996, pp. 311,312)

II. Dressed.

The question is: "What about the being properly dressed part?" That brings us to the words of our Epistle Lesson:

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for all are one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:27,28)

What does that mean: “all are one in Christ Jesus”? Well, they are one because they have been properly dressed in the same garment. “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” “Put on.” Clothed! Dressed in the perfect, holy life of Jesus. This is how God sees us, though the reality of and struggle with sin are still there.

Again, to be baptized into Christ is to “put on Christ”, is to be clothed in His righteousness, His majesty and His strength. And, again, this is how God sees us. Our post sermon hymn for this morning is “Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness.” From the first verse the hymn teaches us, “Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness/My beauty are, my glorious dress”. In baptism we are dressed in the beauty and glory of Christ’s Holy Life! And so, again our text says, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” The Albrecht’s underscore this: “These righteous robes are given to us in Holy Baptism.” (Albrecht’s, p. 312)

Our sermon hymn for this morning was “God’s Own Child, I Gladly Say It”. Please consider, once again, these words of the second stanza:

“Sin, disturb my soul no longer: I am baptized into Christ! I have comfort even stronger: Jesus’ cleansing sacrifice. Should a guilty conscience seize me Since my Baptism did release me In a dear forgiving flood, Sprinkling me with Jesus’ blood?”

With this in mind, I ask you to listen to several insights from A Summary of Christian Doctrine written by Edward W. A. Koehler:

“Thus Baptism not only offers grace, but it also works the faith by which this offer is accepted. **In the case of those who believe before they are baptized, Baptism strengthens their faith** (my emphasis). Hence we confess in the Small Catechism: ‘Baptism works (or imparts) forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.’ (For example, Rom. 6:3,5. “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?...If we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His...”)

“The power of Baptism to offer grace and to work faith **lies not in the water. It is the Word of God, connected with the water** (my emphasis), and the Holy Ghost, operating through this Word, that does these things. With the Word of God the water of Baptism is a ‘washing of regeneration and renewing in the Holy Ghost.’ (Tit. 3:5) (A Summary of Christian Doctrine, CPH, St. Louis, 1952 Copyright, p. 209.)

As has been stated, in the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper God gives us visible elements of water, bread and wine, connects His promises from the Word to them and through these means says to us, “I forgive you of all sin. You are mine. Eternal life in Christ is yours!” Through Word and Sacrament we are dressed in Christ and made ready for the eternal Wedding Feast.

III. Ready To Go.

And here’s the point of all this: The day rapidly approaches when we will be summoned out of this world. Age has absolutely nothing to do with it. God does! He determines it. Job says of humankind (each person) “...his days are determined, and the number of his months is with you, and you have

appointed limits that he cannot pass..." (Job 14:5) Clear and sobering, isn't it? In this verse, life is measured not by many years but by months and days. Very, very short! No guarantees that any human will see old age, or even middle age, or even young adult age. Again, God has "appointed limits (a last moment) (we) cannot pass."

Have you ever heard someone say, "Well, so-and-so (or I) cheated death!"? No they didn't. And they can't. There might be those moments when we like to think we've circumvented death, but we haven't; we don't and we cannot!

When we leave here today let's try to remember that we are preparing for that great, eternal wedding feast - the unending feast - of the church's wedding to Jesus. Through the faith God has given us we are dressed in the proper wedding garment. It is given to us in the written and spoken Word. It is given to us in our Baptisms. It is fed to us in the Lord's Supper. We are physical, visible creatures. Again and again, in the Sacraments God reaches into our lives in physical, visible ways.

Brothers and sisters, what we have received in our Baptisms is truly a miracle. We are ***Dressed And Ready To Go!***

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

June 23, 2019

St. Matthew 22:1-14 & Galatians 3:27-29

“Dressed and Ready to Go!”

I. A Parable to Remember. Matt. 22:1-14

II. Dressed.

III. Ready to Go.

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Avenue
Decatur, Illinois 62526*