

All Dressed Up

October 9, 2011 Ord 29A

Scriptures: Isaiah 25:1-9

25:1 O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you, I will praise your name; for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure.

25:2 For you have made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin; the palace of aliens is a city no more, it will never be rebuilt.

25:3 Therefore strong peoples will glorify you; cities of ruthless nations will fear you.

25:4 For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat. When the blast of the ruthless was like a winter rainstorm,

25:5 the noise of aliens like heat in a dry place, you subdued the heat with the shade of clouds; the song of the ruthless was stilled.

25:6 On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.

25:7 And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever.

25:8 Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.

25:9 It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Matthew 22:1-14

22:1 Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying:

22:2 "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son.

22:3 He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come.

22:4 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.'

22:5 But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business,

22:6 while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them.

22:7 The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.

22:8 Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy.'

22:9 Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.'

22:10 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.

22:11 "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe,

22:12 and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless.

22:13 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.'

22:14 For many are called, but few are chosen."

Proclamation of the Word

I am usually a very practical person. I get the to-do list done before I can have fun. I try to exercise a little, get my sleep, keep up with a few friends, eat sensibly, take a day off. Now you know I am boring and sensible. But I hate to miss a good party!

We know about parties and celebrations living here in Clemson. When I moved here, my friends in other parts of the country would ask what Clemson is like. My reply, "It's a small town with a big personality, like living in a theme party year-round."

Last May when Prince William and Kate Middleton were married, I wasn't going to miss it. You see, I was raised in a family fascinated by all things English since my grandparents were English immigrants. So in 1982 when my mother went to England for the first time, she also brought me memorabilia from THE royal wedding of Princess Diana and Prince Charles. I had watched that wedding as a 10 year old. So when Wills and Kate were to be married almost 30 years later, I wasn't going to miss it. It is tradition. Like they say, do something twice, and it becomes a tradition.

A couple of nutty friends, Maggie Bandy and Amy Elrod, and I had a sleepover so we could wake up early and not disturb the boys in our households. Here I am the mother who makes the children go to school unless they have a fever, but I let Hallie go to school late so she could watch the whole wedding with us. We were up by 5:00 am for the pre-game show.

I brought us all hats to wear which we wore with our bathrobes except for Amy who had crafted her own 'fascinator'- those slim headbands with feathers and flowers. We did not want to miss the party, and we came dressed in our wedding clothes (well, sort of).

It was a silly thing to do, especially since I still had to write a sermon that Friday. Amy had to teach all day. It was totally impractical, made no sense at all. But I was with fun people and made a special memory with my daughter like I had made with my mother when I watched another Royal Wedding thirty years before. It was worth showing up for the wedding!

- Maybe you have almost missed an opportunity to make a memory with an important person.
- Maybe you have passed by a person with whom you could have shared a word of encouragement because you were in a hurry when God has placed that someone in your life for a special reason.
- Maybe you have been asked to do something that would serve God's purposes. Then you get a phone call, and you're off to do something else.

A King gave a wedding banquet for his son. He invited all the guests who had RSVP-ed, but when the time came, they refused to show up. They were too busy, had other priorities, or were antagonistic that they were being asked to come.

God who reaches out to us in love, sets a feast, and invites us to it, desires that we show up and not miss out. Jesus is speaking to the religious insiders of his day. But how many of us, church going folks, are too busy or have other priorities or are annoyed to be ask to do something for God's sake?

So many of us are driven by busy-ness. We live in a world where we are consumed by the immediate crisis before us. Cable news chases the crisis of the day, week or moment. Our lives are filled with electronic devices which add more opportunities to communicate faster. But at times they only increase the volume of clutter and noise. Just watch folks before they get on an airplane. There are the last phone calls and emails that have to get made before the announcement gets made. "Turn off all electronic devices, and stow your tray table in an upright position" After the flight, people are frantically tapping smart phones and cell phones are turned on as soon as possible when the flight lands. In our day and age, I think the real challenge for many of us is discerning the **urgent things** from the **important things**. Many of the king's guests were taking care of urgent business and missed the most important thing they were being asked to do.

Other guests had other priorities. They already had commitments or didn't want to miss something else. They had tee times to make, appointments to schedule, kids activities to get to, or a TV show to watch. They had already scheduled a trip, a haircut, and needed to swing by the grocery store. They've overcommitted their time....overcommitted themselves financially. God gets the leftovers.

Our agendas become so full, so planned, that we might miss the dinner bell when it rings. We sometimes take care of **the urgent things** and miss **the important things**. We miss the person who comes right up to us. That person may have a message from God, a word of grace, or a need which we can address. That person may be sent by God, and we have dismissed him. We have missed out on something important.

Other guests are antagonistic to the invitation and lash out, kill and attack those who come as messengers. They may have been hurt by the church or by Christians. They may lash out because they see hypocrisy and fraud from those who profess the name of Christ, but whose actions appear to contradict the message. They may be angry with the King, or God, over some injustice, some deep hurt, or belief which causes them conflict. They react and shoot the messengers.

The Bible says that all the invited guests make light of the invitation and pay no attention to the call to come join the feast. They ignore it and miss the party. The insiders are not deemed worthy by God. So the King moves to plan B. He says to his assistants, "Invite all the folks down on main street to come to the feast regardless of whether they are good or bad, righteous church folks or not. Invite them to join the feast." The King says, "I'll even provide everyone with wedding clothes to show that they are my guests here at my invitation. All my guests will feast and be included. No one will feel second class because of socio-economics or background or label. I will provide. They just have to get dressed and come."

But there was one guy- there's one in every crowd, who refuses to dress up in the clothes the King offered. That may sound harsh to our ears. Poor guy shows up to eat at the buffet. Maybe he hasn't had a meal in awhile. Maybe he does not like to get dressed up. But he has insulted his host, the King. He accepted the invitation, but ignores the gracious King's agenda. The man's agenda takes priority. **Following Jesus means not adding God's work to our agendas, but getting busy doing the things that are on God's agenda.**

To say it in a different way, he made a commitment to follow Jesus, had a conversion, but does not change anything about his life. He refuses to be transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit within him. Maybe he was dunked in the waters of baptism, but never showed the fruit of faith. We may wear the label Christian for different reasons.

- Perhaps you're a Christian because it's just what you have been expected to do.
- Perhaps you're a Christian, having never been raised in the faith, but you made a conscious decision to follow Jesus.
- Perhaps you're here, but not sure whether you are ready to call yourself a Christian.
- Perhaps you like Jesus, but aren't sure about some of his followers.
- Perhaps you have been raised in the faith never knowing a time when God has not been present in your life. And over time you have experienced a conversion, a change of heart, and faith matters as you grow in your discipleship.

The good news is that the invitation has been sent. Jesus came preaching the kingdom of God and invites all of us to come to the big party!

Matthew's gospel emphasizes the change that happens when a person decides to follow Jesus. Jesus warns in these parables of judgment that our lives should bear fruit of the kingdom. In the New Testament putting on

Christ clothes is used a couple of times by Paul. Paul speaks of baptism into faith this way, “If anyone is in Christ you are a new creation. The old is gone and the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17) In Jesus you have a new way of life, not just a new last name “Christian.” In many places you are given a special white robe for baptism and little babies wear a white dress to symbolize wearing Christ.

When you decide to follow Jesus, you are given all you need for living a faithful and fruitful life. When we stay connected to Jesus, the true vine, we don’t just become part of Jesus’ body for our own good, but so that we might bear fruit for the Kingdom together. Apart from Jesus we can do nothing, John’s gospel says. But we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

Faith is more than showing up, we have to get dressed up in our Christ clothes. Others will see that we belong to Him. Our lives will reflect God’s love.

Paul writes in the letter to the Colossians (3:12-17) about this new life in Christ. These are the things on God’s agenda for us. I am reading from the Bible paraphrase, *The Message*:

¹²⁻¹⁴So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it. ¹⁵⁻¹⁷Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing, sing your hearts out to God! Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way.

So, you who were ordained in your baptism into Christ Jesus, here is your homework:

First assignment- take some time today and this week as you make your “to do” lists, your agendas, to consider what God would have you do. As you look over that agenda, ask yourself what is important, not just urgent, for the sake of sharing the good news of the gospel through acts of kindness, forgiveness and just love. Ask which things would have priority in God’s eyes, and do those things first. As we attend church meetings, PSA, or Bible study ask what should be at the top of our agenda. In our common life together, are we prioritizing the people and things Jesus would put as most important?

Second assignment- consider how you go about your business. Are you doing things in such a way that glorifies God? Are you wearing your Christ clothes, as you make decisions, work on that project, study, and serve that meal, as you minister in Jesus’ name? Are we as a community, a nation reflecting those kingdom priorities in the way we work together or make budgets or love our neighbors?

More than showing up, faith is about dressing up in Him,

allowing Jesus Christ to work in us and through us,

so that when people look at us, they see Jesus first.

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