

Pentecost 18A
October 12, 2014
Rev. Ken Wratten at St Stephen's San Jose
Exodus 32:1-14
Philippians 4:4-13
Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus was assuring the chief priests and the Pharisees that God had planned to invite them to the heavenly banquet at the end of time, to celebrate that God has taken full control. But they had not listened to John the Baptist, and they had ignored the message brought to them by Jesus; in fact they were at that very time plotting to kill Jesus. And so God would be inviting everyone, Jew and Gentile alike, to that great celebration banquet. But the important detail for us to consider today is that although everyone is invited, not everyone will be chosen to stay, unless they choose to 'dress appropriately' for the event.

“When the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. 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.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

That treatment seems rather harsh for someone who just got invited off the street, without notice to go home and prepare, and was not wearing the right clothes. But if the king is God, and the banquet celebrates the culmination of God's Grand Plan, the response makes sense if the garment to be selected and worn is Christ.

In Romans 13:12, Paul says “Let us lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light... put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” In Galatians 3:27, Paul says, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

How do we put on Christ? What does it mean to clothe ourselves with Christ? When God invites us to this banquet, to celebrate the completion of his Grand Plan for creation, when God's reign is fully established on earth, in that moment, what are the holy habits we will have taken on, and learned, and ingrained so they become part of us? What attributes will we ALREADY be wearing?

Paul gives his dearest friends in Philippi a reminder of the life of faith that he taught them, the life that Christ-followers are to live into:
Rejoice in the Lord always; Paul wrote from a prison cell in Rome about this sense of joyfulness. His outward circumstances did not rule his inner attitude. He was describing a life of joy (different from happiness) that was not a matter of mood, but of will.
Let your gentleness be known to all; This certainly reflects the mind of Christ, who loved being with children, cared deeply about marginalized people, and even forgave the people who put him on the cross. To whom do we owe a spirit of gentleness?
Do not worry about anything, but make your requests to God in prayer; Being robed in Christ teaches us that prayer changes things – and it changes us.

Dedicate your lives to thinking about things that are true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise. The results will be to receive God's peace, and for God to recognize that we have 'put on Christ', and made him an integral part of who we are. Being Christian is not just what we call ourselves; not only what we have learned is 'good' and we should aspire to be like, but this is a call to prioritize our life toward building our life with Christ. We will have prioritized our activities to grow into deeper relationship with Christ. We will have committed ourselves to spend time with other Christians, to work through our own challenges with their help and prayer support, and to help them work through their challenges. "Putting on Christ" is an investment we willingly decide to make, like putting on a P-coat when we know that cold weather is coming, so that we are ready for any foul weather that hits us. With Christ already wrapped around us and in us, we are dressed for whatever comes our way.

I have had people approach me when a loved-one dies, and they don't know how to honor that life, or to say goodbye. They know they want God involved in it.

I have had people approach me to get married, or to renew vows from a civil ceremony, and they know they want God involved in it.

I have had people approach me about disagreements, like Paul was describing between Euodia (u-ō'-di-a) and Syntyche (sin'-ti-chē) in Philippi, and he knew that God needed to be involved in resolving it.

We see terrorism leading to barbarous acts of cruelty toward innocent people. God needs to be involved.

We see people in harm's way because of the egocentric authority of rulers. God needs to be involved.

The way God gets involved is by the world seeing God's love in action through us who "wear Christ" in the way we raise our children, and handle our family relationships, and operate our church community, and commit ourselves to the health and vibrancy of our relationships, and engage ourselves in the world.

Let's commit, with all the energy and resolve we can muster, to clothe ourselves with Christ, and help to clothe each other with Christ; to reinforce how fundamental our joy in Christ is to our outlook, our attitude, our true joy, our generosity and our care for each other. THIS is what our faith journey is about.

Let's take our instruction from Paul; "Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen, and the God of peace will be with you." Amen.