

*Stories Jesus Told, Pt. 3*  
***For Heaven's Sake, Put Your Clothes On!***  
Matthew 22: 1-14

**First Presbyterian Church  
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Have you ever been in the Orlando airport? It always cracks me up to see the family groups wearing matching tee shirts on their way to Disney. Big letters on boldly colored shirts declare, “I’m in Paw Paw’s Pack!” The 9-year-old boy thinks it’s all pretty cool. The 14-year-old girl can’t get over her embarrassment. She prays none of her friends will see her. The Dad just has a resigned look on his face. Paw Paw, however, smiles big. He’s paying for all this, so everyone has to wear his tee shirt. He loves it. You want Disney for free? You gotta wear the shirt. No shirt, no trip. Hold that idea as we walk through today’s parable.

Jesus told the story during the last week of his life. It’s the third of three pointed stories he told to the Pharisees and religious leaders. Jesus was making a last-ditch effort to get them to open their eyes and see in him the Christ they’d been praying for. He wanted to shock them with the realization that their privileged place was not guaranteed to last forever. In fact, throughout Israel’s history, the priests and leaders had consistently rejected the prophets the LORD sent. The nation took God’s favor for granted. They flirted with the gods of other nations. They neglected their poor, their widows and orphans and retreated into pleasing themselves. And once again, they were on the verge of a disastrous decision. The Father had sent his beloved Son, but they were refusing him.

So Jesus told them another story about the Kingdom of Heaven. That’s the situation where God’s will and way prevails and all is set right. This Kingdom can be compared to a king whose son was about to get married. The king invited all the nobility and business leaders to come celebrate. After all, the wedding of the prince brought the promise of an heir to the throne and an heir after that. A royal wedding meant stability and joy for the nation.

In those days, there were two steps in the invitation process. The first was a kind of “save the date” message. My son will be married in June. We want you to

come. We'll send a message when everything is ready. The exact time could not be predicted since preparations were literally a farm to table process. But when the second invitation was sent, it came with urgency. There were no refrigerators to keep food from spoiling or microwaves to warm what got cold. The second invitation meant, "Now! The time is now." This king was hosting a one-of-a-kind costly feast.

Who would refuse such an invitation? Who has anything better to do than a royal wedding? But the guests ignored the notice. They found their farms and businesses more interesting. The insult was unmistakable. We are deliberately not coming. This doesn't matter to us. Who rejects a king's invitation? People who don't want to be under the authority of that king. In fact, it got worse. Some of the invited people abused the royal messengers. They treated them shamefully, even killed some of them. This was deliberate, open rebellion.

Can you imagine the crowds listening to this? They lived in a kingdom. They understood that a land flourishes when a king rules well and the people follow his rule. There's a covenant between a sovereign and his subjects which protects everyone. This open defiance would lead to anarchy. To gang rule. The king had to act. Either abdicate the throne and leave his nation to chaos, or subdue the rebels. In Jesus' story, the king acts predictably. He sends his soldiers to destroy those who murdered his servants and burn down their city.

Then the king seeks to bring stability and joy back on stage. He sends his servants to invite others to the feast. Everything is ready. Come celebrate the wedding of the king's son. The people crowded in, both good and bad, high and low. The wedding hall was filled with guests. The people endorsed the king and rejoiced in the years to come.

That would have been a nice ending. What a good king. He feasts his people. He subdues enemies. He insures continuity. Crisis averted. Happily ever after. But Jesus adds a twist. After the great supper was festively under way, the king made his grand entrance. As he made the rounds speaking to people, he noticed a man who was not wearing a wedding garment. He was startled. Things got tense.

So what's the big deal? What was the wedding garment? Did he mean simply the clothes you're supposed to wear to a wedding? A clean robe? Fancy shoes? If so, maybe this guy was like the cowboy who wouldn't change out of his boots and hat for the reception at the country club. "I don't wear a monkey suit for anyone." Or maybe he means a special garment provided by the king himself for

the occasion. “Here, everyone gets to wear a plaid stole to celebrate the bride’s heritage. Just put it on over your clothes.” Or maybe it’s the way your host hands you a hat and says, “We’re all wearing funny hats tonight for Mardi Gras. Just pop this on.” We can imagine that if the king provided robes, then the distinction between poor and rich, high and low, would disappear. We’re all equally the guests of the king. For some reason, this fellow did not have the right clothes on.

The king wants to give him the benefit of the doubt. He calls him friend. “My friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?” At which point, the man could have said, “I’m sorry, I didn’t know.” Or “Oh my, my good robe was torn.” Or “I didn’t see the servant passing these out.” Instead, he says nothing. We get the idea that this is a willful neglect. I won’t wear your special swag. I don’t want any king’s merch on me. I will not identify with you or this wedding. The king realized the willfulness. He saw the gravity of the insult and had the man bound hand and foot, then tossed out. Permanently exiled to darkness.

This shocked the audience. You Pharisees in your fine robes, with your prayer tassels at the bottom. You with your little scrolls of God’s Word in a box on your forehead. You with all the signs that you are chosen, righteous and favored. If you don’t wear the sign that you celebrate the king’s son, you’re on your way out. The clothes of your own resume, your own achievements, your own virtue, your own earned worth—they don’t work in the king’s banquet hall. You need the wedding garment he supplies. You have to submit to wearing something you did not create.



Jesus was not just making this up. As creative as Jesus is, he always drew from a source in the Hebrew Scriptures. In Isaiah 61, we read what the Christ will do for his people. He comes:  
to grant to those who mourn in Zion—  
to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,  
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,  
the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit (Is. 61: 3)

Through his Messiah, the LORD wants to adorn his grieving people with joy. He wants to trade the ashes of their broken lives for a beautiful headdress of mercy. A few verses later, he gets even clearer:

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD;  
my soul shall exult in my God,  
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;

he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,  
as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress,  
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels (Is. 61: 10).

The king wants to confer his own worth on his lowly subjects. He wants to take a people in exile and make them members of his royal court. He wants to supply righteousness to a sinful people. He wants to marry his people, decking out his bride in the finest of everything. That's the trade he wants to make. I will take the forsaken and rejected and make them the prize jewel.

But there is a catch. We have to be willing to wear the king's wedding garment. That requires a degree of submission. Will I bow my head and let you place that headdress on me? Will I let you cover all the signs of my worth that I think I have achieved with the only worth that matters: your love and grace?

The people in Jesus' story had grown indifferent to the requests of the king. Their own pursuits distracted them. They took for granted what he had to offer. We may well feel that about many aspects of our life in Christ. I take for granted that inspiring, soaring, moving worship is always available to me here. I take for granted that the Creator of the universe waits upon me to decide to enter a conversation with him.

And more, sometimes I just don't want to wear his garments. I'd rather fit in more easily with the rest of the world. I would like to build my own life. I'd like to present to the world garments that are my own design. I want a life that's in my control. I don't want to belong to the King, except on my terms.

During interviews with confirmation students, I always present Rev. 3: 20. Jesus says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him." I ask what you would do if you saw Jesus standing right now at the door to my office. One guy said, "Well, I used to think I didn't want to let him in. But now I'd open the door. As long as he stays on the other side of the room! Well maybe I could let him sit on this couch, as long as there is some space between us. I don't mind his being here, but I don't really want to have to talk. Because I know I'll have to change. I don't want him but I do want him, if you know what I mean." I do know what you mean.

Opening the door, wearing the wedding clothes, it's the same. Will I surrender more of myself to Christ? Will I bow the knee to him as my king? Will I release what I'm holding onto against his will?



There's a great scene in an episode of *Sherlock* in which the secret service comes to Sherlock's flat and demands that he come with them. Sherlock refuses until they tell him where he's going. They won't tell him. He won't get dressed. Finally, they take him wrapped in a bed sheet to Buckingham

Palace. The royals need his help to manage a scandal. But Sherlock still refuses to get dressed. Like a petulant child, he stays in the bedsheet trying to get his way. Finally his brother Mycroft comes in. He says in exasperation, "You are in Buckingham Palace. This is the heart of the British Empire. Sherlock Holmes, put your trousers on!"

That's really the word for us today. The king has invited us to a banquet. We dare not be indifferent or distracted. He offers us a beautiful garment to put on. He is willing to take our filthy rags and give us a shimmering robe of his own righteousness. He will give us by grace all we lack. If we will but agree to tilt our heads and accept the gift. This could be for the first time. Or it could be as lifelong Christians, we are still trying to do parts of life on our own terms. We still want to be kings and queens of our little realm. Only darkness awaits down that path.

The invitations are still out. It is not too late. When the king enters the hall, how will he find us? The classic hymn "On Christ the Solid Rock," contains the lines, "O may I then be found, dressed in his righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne." Christ Jesus has a graceful robe of rightness and wholeness and peace to give us. He wants us at the feast. So heaven's sake, put his clothes on!