

Sermon for Pentecost 23A  
Sunday, October 15, 2023  
“Are you wearing your wedding garment?”

Text: Matthew 22:1-14

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today’s gospel lesson from St. Matthew is an allegory—a story, poem, or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one. As such there are several possible interpretations and comments that could be made from it. This parable is an allegory: The king is God the Father, and the son who is being honored at the banquet is Jesus Christ, who “came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.” Israel was given an invitation to the kingdom, but when the time actually came for the kingdom to appear, they refused to believe it. Many prophets, including John the Baptist, had been silenced. The king’s reprisal against the murderers could be interpreted to represent the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple at the hands of the Romans in the year 70. Matthew ended the parable with the advice of Jesus that “many are called, but few are chosen.” Many people got an invitation. The ones who accepted the invitation were the very people we didn’t expect—the people from off the streets, and they showed up properly dressed, except for one guest, who showed up without the garment.

In other words, the people who were expected to understand what Jesus was all about were the religious leaders, the people who knew the scriptures and could make the connection, but the people who were actually embracing the message and the life that Jesus had to offer were tax collectors, prostitutes, people who were on the fringes of society. They showed up to the wedding with a proper wedding garment. But others said they were followers of Jesus, but they were not fully committed to the movement, which was unexpected, radical, and revolutionary; they were like the guest who showed up, but wasn’t properly dressed. There are many things that I could say to you about this parable, but today I want to put this question before you: Are you wearing your wedding garment?

At the point in Jesus’s ministry when he told this parable, it was the final days of his ministry on earth and he was skating on thin ice. Jesus told this parable following his triumphal entry into Jerusalem and after he turned over the tables in the Temple, so the political and religious leaders—the status quo—were enraged with Jesus and were beginning to plot to kill him. Jesus was foreshadowing things to come, and by the time this Gospel was written, around the year 80 CE, Matthew had an important message to tell the members of a young Christian community, who were probably still devastated by the destruction of their beloved temple ten years earlier, and were feeling threatened by fear of persecution that could lead to their deaths. This parable is a lesson in commitment; it has nothing to do with how to dress for church.

Recently, I have been thinking a lot about commitment: the world’s commitment to peace. Society’s commitment to building community. Believers’ commitment to the

principles of the faith they proclaim. Our commitment as members of All Saints to what this place stands for and who we are trying to be as a voice for hope and God's love to each other and to the world. Are you showing up to the wedding properly dressed? Are you wearing your wedding garment?

All of us who call ourselves Christians are supposed to be committed to what that means. The parable tells us that a seat at the king's wedding banquet in the Kingdom of Heaven requires something more than merely accepting an invitation. It's not enough to RSVP and just show up. We can't simply call ourselves Christians and sit passively in the pews or watch church on YouTube. We have to have some skin in the game. We have to put our money where our mouth is when we call ourselves Christians.

I know that events happening around the world, particularly in the Holy Land, have been on our minds this past week. I know it has been on my mind. The horrendous attacks on innocent people, the bloodshed, the atrocities that we are hearing about and seeing on the news and on the internet are shocking. And then the reactions from various groups are driving wedges between people and worsening an already polarized situation. The bishops of our diocese issued a statement yesterday denouncing the atrocities perpetuated by Hamas. Let me share some of their words with you:

“We grieve for hostages taken, mourn for lives lost, and lament for the searing memories that may not heal in this lifetime. We perceive the dreadful fear of the innocent people of Gaza whose lives are already uprooted and who have no place to go. Hamas has built tunnels for war but not shelters for safety.

The complexity of the situation is numbing and there are no easy pathways to a lasting resolution. Palestinians and Israelis both yearn for peace, but the power of evil and the frailty of human beings press against these hopes and dreams. Israel has a right to exist, and Palestinians need a homeland.”

They are calling for our prayers. As Christians, we have the responsibility to stand up against injustice and violence. That is the wedding garment we are expected to wear. You know that every week we pray for people in various countries who are facing injustice, the suppression of their rights in their homelands. There are far more specific people we could pray for, but we have chosen places that our own members requested: China, Venezuela, Ukraine, and Palestinians. Many of those living in Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, and so on are our Christian sisters and brothers and they do face hardships, injustices, and disrespect. But, let me be clear, we do not support the violence perpetuated by Hamas, by Russia, or by any other group whose methods at grabbing for power use inhumane methods and harm innocent people. Groups like Hamas spread their message of hate by hiding behind labels of nationality, ethnicity, and religion; even their own compatriots and religious leaders are against what they stand for. We don't even need to look elsewhere to see this behavior; it happens right here in

our own back yard where hate groups of various types spread their message and cause harm against Blacks, Whites, Latinos, Asians, Jews, Muslims, Roman Catholics, women, the GLBTQ+ community, and so on, under the cloak of being patriotic or Christian. Added to the Prayers of the People today is a prayer written by Archbishop Hosam Naoum, the Anglican Archbishop of Jerusalem; we were in seminary together and he is a friend of mine, and he is a Palestinian Christian. St. James said in his epistle, “The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.” We must pray for the people suffering in foreign lands, we must pray for people who are suffering in our own land, AND we must pray for our enemies, that their hearts will be changed and end their violent methods to gain power. Christians pray, even for our enemies; that is our wedding garment.

Closer to home, we need to step up in our commitment to our community and to our parish family. If you are a member of All Saints Church, then you’ve been invited to the wedding banquet. We expect you to come correct, dressed in a proper wedding garment. What do I mean by that? I expect your support for this place that you say you love. In the coming weeks, your leaders here are going to be up front about the growing needs we have in this place. We need each of you to be participating in our ministries, we need each of you to come up with ideas of new projects and ministries that we can be doing, we need each of you to support financially the ministry of this place, those of you who are watching virtually, if you’re local, we need you showing up in person because you’re a beloved member of this community and we miss seeing you. We need all of that, so that, as the church, we can continue being a visible witness to the good news of Jesus Christ and the movement of God in this world. We need need you to wear your wedding garment.

Finally, let us never forget whose we are. We belong to God; we are his children and the sheep of his pasture. We must never lose confidence in the one who, indeed, is our shepherd, who leads us in paths of righteousness, who comforts us in our affliction, strengthens us in the face of adversity, and never ceases to pursue us with his mercy and lovingkindness. Our prayers help us both to find our wedding garment and keep wearing it, even when we feel like taking it off or when someone threatens to pull it off. Because, we are Christians, and we follow the words and teachings of him who is the Prince of Peace, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

### Resources

Karoline Lewis, “What not to wear” in *The Working Preacher*, <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=4980>.

“What is the meaning of the Parable of the Wedding Feast?”, <https://www.gotquestions.org/parable-wedding-feast.html>.