

The Twenty Second Sunday after Pentecost ~ Proper 23, Year A
October 12, 2008
The Reverend Rob P. Travis

“Wearing The Party Clothes Of The King”

You might get sick of hearing about my little girls, by the time I'm through here. But recently, when I think about God, I find that God communicates images to me through them. So I go with what I am given.

If there is one thing Eva Jane and Annalise know about it is how to dress for a party, or in their case, a Ball. On our first day at our new house, I came home from work, and Eva Jane and Annalise ran out to me, across the front yard, saying those beloved words “Daddy, Daddy!” They were wearing their ball gowns, Eva Jane in the light blue of Cinderella, Annalise in the yellow and blue of Snow White. “We're going to a Ball, do you want to come and dance with us?” Any prince would have been honored to dance with them. Their clothes showed them as ready for the grandest of parties.

The person at the end of Jesus' parable on the other hand was not wearing a wedding garment, when the king came to meet his guests. And he was thrown out at the King's command. This part of the parable is shocking to me, and I imagine to many of you, as I think about the graciousness of God, and am surprised that He requires anything of his guests, much less that he would throw out one who was found not to be wearing the appropriate clothes. What is going on here

Well let's go back to the beginning of the parable and look at how we get to that point. The King has put on this wedding feast for his son. But the people he has invited do not come. He gives them the courtesy of two invitations, but the guests scorn his second invitation, when he tells them that all is ready, and that a lavish feast is prepared for them to enjoy. Some of the invited even kill the messengers the King sent to them.

Of course the King is enraged. Some see the destruction of the city in the parable as directly reflective of the destruction of Jerusalem, the city of God's chosen people Israel, by Rome in 70 AD. In any case, it is easy to see the connection between the invited banquet guests and the chosen people of Israel.

The King then tells his remaining servants to go out into the streets and invite everyone they find to the wedding banquet. The slaves gather everyone, good and bad. And the wedding hall is filled with guests. These people were not prepared for the banquet, but the fact that when the King comes and sees the guests he notices one who is not wearing a wedding robe indicates that the King provided appropriate attire for his new guests from his own wardrobe.

The King's graciousness and generosity is emphasized not just by his invitation of everyone, but his preparing them for the banquet they were otherwise not ready to attend.

Being found without a wedding garment indicated that that person was rejecting the King's graciousness, behaving much like those who were originally invited, but did not attend the banquet. The King accepted both the good and the bad as guests at the banquet in honor of his son, but he provided clothing to all, to make them equally worthy for his royal affair. The person found not wearing the garment he was given showed his unwillingness to be acceptable for the party. In a sense, the attitude of the guest is more important than the original invitation.

For Eva Jane and Annalise, it is not so much the fact that they put on their ball gowns, though they would say it is, but that they feel celebratory in them that makes them wear those clothes when they want to have a ball.

If we are the people who God our King has called to this wedding feast for his Son, gathering us in from the streets of our distracted lives, even though we were not originally part of the chosen people, what are these wedding clothes? How can we make sure we are properly attired for this grand ball? How can we engage our lives in such a way that we feel like guests at a royal ball? That's where the apostle Paul is helpful. He gives us the practical guide for what makes us acceptable and worthy to be guests of the Lord. Indeed, Paul tells us in Galatians to put on Christ as if Christ were the garment. He describes this putting on of Christ, as being that which erases the distinctions between us, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, Male nor Female." Invited party goer, or street person gathered to the banquet. "All are one in Christ Jesus."

But how do we make sure we are clothed in Christ? Paul gives us some very helpful ideas in his letter to the Philippians, which we heard today. The garment of the banquet is characterized by Peace. The peace of God, which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. You know you are on the right track about your life when you feel peace about it. When you can stand before God, clothed with His peace you know you are ready for his banquet. But how does one attain that peace? Paul repeats Jesus' command, not to worry about anything, and he adds, that whenever anything concerns you by prayer, and supplication with thanksgiving make your requests known to God. That should be sufficient to ensure that you will be clothed with God's garment of peace.

But if that is not enough, strive to think about those things which are true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, and commendable. If there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise. Think about those things.

These days it is hard to wear the garment of peace. There are so many things to worry about, not the least of them is the economic crisis that is besetting our nation, and by ex-

tension of our influence the whole world. Many of you are facing real financial difficulty, and are uncertain about what the future holds for your businesses and your lives. It is easy to be mired in worry, to be clothed in anxiety, to wander in fear. While some are inclined to think that it has never been this bad. Because not too long ago things were pretty good, and for some, incredibly prosperous. Really, deep struggles have always been there, certainly Paul's time was fraught with uncertainty, and there were many things to be worried about. Paul was imprisoned, beaten, shipwrecked, certain that he was facing inevitable execution.

Yet Paul came to understand, and recommend that we not allow ourselves to be distracted from the Peace of God, by thinking about the things which cause us anxiety. Rather, he teaches us that by thinking about the true, and the good, the just and the pure, we can be enveloped in the peace of God. It reminds me of Jesus telling us that we must become like children, to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. And again, I think of my girls, my window into childhood. And recognize, that they know how to do it, to lose themselves in thinking about good things, to forget their worries and struggles, by deciding it is time to don party clothes and dance. They view the world in wonder, and take it all in, each new day a gift from God.

I think Paul was getting to that point, and understanding where it came from, that intentionally thinking about the pure, the true, the noble and praiseworthy, would lead to that sense of wonder in all things, even if life seems headed down a dark path. When we struggle to think about those things because our worries distract us we should lift up those worries to God in prayer, and give thanks to Him for the blessings we have already received. God has given us the ability to focus on good things, to turn to Him in prayer when we are distracted from enjoying the peace he has given us. He wants us to honor his invitation to this banquet by clothing ourselves in the garment of peace He has provided for us. And this banquet is not just to be enjoyed in the next life, it is available to us now. And everyone is invited.

So if you find yourself worried or despairing these days, turn those worries over to God in prayer, don't dwell on the troubles but strive to think about noble and praiseworthy things, and put on the party clothes that God has provided for your heart and mind. Participate fully in the banquet you have been called to, and ask your daddy to dance. You've been given the gown, you're ready for the banquet. All you have to do is get dressed. Clothe your mind and heart with his peace.

Amen.