

“Yes” to God’s Dress

For some brides to be the dress is everything. For the past thirteen years, the reality TV show called “Say Yes to the Dress” has stressed just how important choosing the right dress is when one is getting married. This show focuses on the events at Kleinfeld Bridal Salon in Manhattan. The show highlights the interactions between brides to be and various sales associates and fitters who work for Kleinfeld Salon. The show’s premise is that having the right dress is crucial. The show normally extols the power of the perfect wedding gown to help the would be bride overcome some personal difficulty or to transform the bride’s self-image. It should be noted that the show has updated a number of protocols about buying the right dress during a pandemic. Gown shopping and fittings are by appointment only, gowns are sanitized between appointments, bows and curtsies are acceptable, hugging is not, and finally masks are mandatory but make it hard to judge the would be bride’s reactions..

In our Gospel lesson this morning, Jesus tells a wedding parable where having the right dress is important. This morning we hear Matthew’s version of a parable told by Jesus about a King inviting folks to his son’s wedding festivities. The gospel writer Luke also tells the same story, but Luke’s version focuses on the excuses people make for non-attendance, while Matthew’s version focuses on the rude rejection of the King’s invitation. Matthew has the strange addition of the man who gets ejected from the wedding for failing to wear the correct wedding garment.

Jesus apparently liked weddings...we know he attended and miraculously helped cater the wedding at Cana...employed wedding imagery in his teaching...compared the church to a bride adorned for her bridegroom...this morning’s parable...King who invites a large crowd to the wedding of his son. Jesus seemed to like weddings...I would think this is good news to a culture like ours where we seem to be obsessed with all things wedding. Cable networks are cashing in; wedding reality shows like Say Yes to the Dress abound. One website estimates that in the US alone some \$70 billion dollars are spent on weddings annually. Average wedding now costs north of \$30,000 –

If we are wedding obsessed...the people in today’s Gospel parable are wedding averse or wedding allergic. They RSVP with a resounding “no”! For most of Jesus’ audience and for most of us the meaning is obvious. Jesus used wedding imagery to describe the coming of God’s kingdom, a day when the messiah, the bridegroom...would receive the honor due to him and enjoy an extravagant feast of celebration and joy. Yet rather than be filled with honor and excitement, rather than saving the date and marking their calendars...God’s people, like the guests in the story couldn’t care less. Rather than embrace the bridegroom, they nail him to a cross

What does Jesus parable have to say to us...today? It reminds us that God is a gracious and inviting host. God’s hospitality is gracious, wide spread and inclusive. It may sound painfully simple, but enjoy and celebrate that you have been invited to the feast. If the promises of God are true (and I believe they are) and the gifts we receive now are just a glimpse of the future...gifts like forgiveness of sin, eternal life and connectedness with our creator. Then we should be the happiest people on earth. The

parable reminds us that we don't deserve a place at the table, we haven't earned the right to attend the feast; but God graciously has included us. Let the invitation sink in...you've been invited to God's party. Shouldn't we feel joy and excitement over been invited to God's party?

Yet Jesus parable points out that all too often we humans fail to grab hold of God's invitation...we fail to RSVP when God invites. One of the learnings from Jesus story this morning is that often we get distracted; we get too busy to connect with God. We rudely reject God's generous and gracious invitation.

Cultural observers tell us we live in a time when people are spiritual, but not religious. We're told that folks, even before the pandemic, want to connect with God, rather than connect with the church. But this morning's parable reminds us that people have always had a tendency to become spiritually distracted...too busy for God...failing to RSVP to the almighty. I had a plaque early in my ministry that hung in my office. "The person who is too busy to pray is busier than God intends them to be"

But what do we make of the man thrown out of the wedding for failing to be dressed appropriately. Scholars have struggled for centuries to explain this mystery. Some have argued that the man without appropriate wedding attire foreshadows Judas and his betrayal of the King's son; plausible...yes? Others have suggested that the man simply took God's invitation too casually...not preparing for the wedding; not responding to God's grace with a change of heart. Those who follow this line of thinking remind us that God grace is free, but it's not cheap. It cost God a son. We are reminded to respond with lives of faith and gratitude. This is a line of thinking that fits well with our stewardship theme of growing in faith growing in generosity. We respond with grateful and generous hearts to God's gracious gift of life.

There is still one other way to understand the man who fails to dress correctly for the King's wedding. In the first century, the king would have provided wedding garments for people to wear, and the man has simply shown another way of refusing God's invitation, by failing to wear the provided gown. Scholars who accept this line of thinking argue that God' the king seeks to cloth us in Christ; in other words in baptism we put on the righteousness of Christ.

We are entering into that time in the church year when we talk about stewardship. It is often assumed that stewardship is about money, but actually stewardship is about discipleship.. It is a reminder that stewardship is about everything we do and say after we say I believe in Christ. Stewardship is about putting on Christ...growing in Christlikeness as a followers...stewardship is about discipleship.

An amusing story appeared recently in the magazine Today's Christian Woman. A woman took her four-year-old granddaughter, Amanda, to the doctor's office with a fever. The doctor looked in her ears and said, "Who's in there? Donald Duck?" She said, "No." He looked in her nose and said, "Who's in there? Mickey Mouse?" Again she said, "No." He put his stethoscope on her heart and said, "Who's in there? Barney?" Amanda replied, "No, Jesus is in my heart. Barney is on my underwear." (3)
I don't guess it matters who's on your clothing if Jesus is in your heart. And if Jesus is in your heart, your life will be clothed in proper apparel faith, hope, love, forgiveness, tolerance and all the virtues of the Christian life; you will be properly dressed

Say Yes to God's dress...Accept God's gracious invitation...clothe yourself in Christ