

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Pentecost 20
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Sermon by Pastor Daniel Gensmer
The King is calling, come clothed

—Mathew 22:1-14

Marriage is wild. It's absolutely crazy that God designed men and women to be complementary to one another. I mean, you take one man, and you take one woman and with God's blessing, the two leave their Father and Mother and become one flesh. Yes, marriage is wild, but a close second is planning the wedding itself. Because that is a beast all to its own.

You might not know this about my wife, but she is a massive planner. She had this binder with every detail for our wedding, from the photographer to the late-night loaded potato bar. From 9 in the morning until midnight, every detail of that day was planned to perfection. Now, no wedding is complete without guests. And sure, it's disappointing when the guests you invited RSVP "no," but there is one thing that I discovered is even worse than someone not being able to come to the big day you planned so carefully.

Now ladies, picture this: your big day is here. You've spent months planning, and you now wait at the back of the church with your hair and makeup done, in the perfect white wedding dress. And as you turn the corner to walk down the aisle, you spot it. A woman showed up in her own white dress. Only the bride is supposed to wear white! That woman came clothed incorrectly. Talk about the disrespect as that woman makes your day all about her. All because she came clothed incorrectly, and the parable Jesus shares with us today carries a similar picture. God has planned a wedding banquet of his own, and you're invited. Your King calls, and he wants two things. He wants you to come to his banquet. And he wants you to Come Clothed Correctly.

Now, this parable has two parallel movements going on here. You have the original guest list that was invited to the King's wedding banquet, and you have the ultimate open invitation for the king's entire kingdom. So, what happened with that first round? Well, Jesus says that the King, "sent out his servants to summon those who were invited to the wedding banquet but they did not want to come.

Ok so they RSVPed "no". They didn't even provide a reason; they just straight up said, "no!" But the King didn't want to settle, so he sent his servants out again. And this time their message pointed to everything the King has done to prepare this banquet for these special guests. "Tell those who are invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner. My oxen and my fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready, come to the wedding banquet!" The King Called.

And how did the people respond? Well, some just ignored the King's personal request. Talk about a gutsy move, standing up the king like that! But we are told that others took it further: "they seized the king's servants, mistreated them, and killed them." So, the King reacted in kind.

Now why did Jesus even start with this first part of the parable? Well, he was talking to the Pharisees and the Jews who continued to reject God. Only a chapter later, Jesus lamented over God's chosen people who were first up on the guest list for his banquet: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"

You see, God sent his servants to his special guests over and over and over again. But time and again they rejected those prophets; they murdered them and stoned them, and on occasions chucked them into cisterns. The Israelites had made it clear: they didn't merely want to RSVP "no" to God's invitation; they wanted nothing to do with their King.

So, what happened next? Well, the King still wanted his banquet filled. His desire never changed. So, he sent his servants out to herald his kingdom from the crossroads. The King Called all people, and the parable explicitly points out that the King Called both the good and the bad, regardless of their social standing. But this wasn't a description of the King being desperate. Rather the King was being gracious, gracious enough to invite even those you would never expect. And this is so clear in the fact that the King still had one expectation. His standards did not change. Yes, the King Called, but he still wanted his guests to Come Clothed Correctly.

This is where we get to that man, the one that caught the eye of the king in the worst of ways. I mean, what was going through that man's head? Why in the world would he show up at a royal wedding banquet, the privilege of a lifetime, without at least pulling out his church clothes? Or at least his Sabbath best?

But no, he decided it would be ok if he just "came as he was. And in his defense, maybe he had absolutely no other outfits at his disposal. Or maybe he saw the King's open invite as absolute desperation.

After all, think about what just happened. The King's original guests rejected him. They refused to come. So, the King opened the doors and sent his servants out to the crossroads to bring everybody in, the good, the bad, the ugly too. And maybe this man thought, "Well, if the King is willing to invite people like us, then surely, he isn't going to be picky about what we wear. If he really wants his banquet filled that badly, then I can come however I want."

But that's exactly where he was wrong. The King's invitation was gracious, but the King's standards had not changed. He still expected his guests to come clothed for the wedding. The open invitation didn't mean, "Come as you are." It meant "Come" clothed correctly.

It's that heinous "come as you are" mentality that really gets us into hot water. Come as you are? Really? This is God's holy banquet; this isn't just another get-together at the local Chuck E. Cheese. God our King, has prepared a spiritual feast for you today; you now sit in his banquet hall as he serves you a heaping scoop of grace, rich, meaty Gospel, and a refreshing cup of salvation. But he looks out over the guests he has called to his banquet, and what does he see? People who decided to come as they were. You came in spiritual clothes that were stained, torn, and reek of sin: Clothes stained by the wreckage of relationships you have broken; Clothes torn to shreds just like the vows you made on your wedding day; Clothes that reek of the substances you've used to numb yourself to the pain you've endured. Come as you are? Is that a joke? This is your King's banquet, and the Sin-Stained Sacks you wear are an eyesore. Your King calls you, and you come like this?

What else could you wear? It's not like you have a backup outfit you could place over your soul. Like the man confronted by his king, we have no choice but to sit there speechless. That is, until we look to our baptism. Because the Apostle Paul lays it out clear as day, "as many of you as were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ" (Gal 3:27). Now the Clothing of Christ is a garment fit for a banquet like this. Rather than clothes stained by a wreckage of relationships, Christ clothes you with his perfect love. Rather than clothes torn to shreds like the vows you've made, Christ clothes you with his perfectly intact faithfulness. Rather than clothes that reek of numbing substances, Christ clothes you with the aroma of his holiness

Because that's what Jesus did. He wore your sin so that you could wear his righteousness.

And there is a neat opportunity here, because your King not only calls you to his banquet; he gives you a place where you can take those old clothes off. Your King Calls you to the foot of the Cross.

That's what confession is, and that word "confess" might sound like a big churchy word. But confession is simply taking off the Sin-Stained Sacks we wear and laying them at the foot of the cross as we declare "Here it is, Lord. This is what I've done. This is what I've thought. This is what I've said."

If there is a sin you have been carrying around under your clothes, something you're ashamed to say out loud, something you have never told anyone something that keeps haunting you. Take it off. You don't have to keep wearing it. Your King has already given you something better to wear.

Your King calls you to take it off. Bring it to him. Bring it to the cross. And if you need to, bring it to one of your pastors here in private confession. Not so that you can earn a new garment, but because your King has already given you Christ. He simply wants you to hear his voice personally declare, "your sins are forgiven."

And with that new holy garment of Christ draped over your soul, you are finally prepared to enter into the banquet. Because yes, the King calls, and he calls you from whatever corner of his kingdom you were hiding in before. But he doesn't call you to come as you are, he calls you to come clothed in Christ. And that is exactly what you are. You are clothed in your Savior.

When your King calls you, he calls you twice. Your King calls you to the Cross to confess and discard those Sin-Stained Sacks forever. And your King calls you to his banquet where he has laid out a Gospel feast for you to devour. You never have to worry again how the King will react, those rags you had on before are gone, now you Come Clothed in Christ. Your King Calls, Come. Come confidently. Because you Come Clothed in Christ.