



# Deering Community Church

Pastor: Barbara Lockett Currie

What Are You Wearing?

Sermon for 10-9-11

Scripture: Philippians 4:1-9; Matthew 22:1-14

Are you dressed appropriately for church? Suit and tie? Dress and heels? Jeans and T-shirt? Shorts and tank top? Does it matter what you wear? Maybe in some churches it still does. When I was growing up, I remember how fancy everyone dressed for church. Most all of the women even wore hats. We called dress up clothes “Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes”. I can remember as a teenager being upset that women used church as a place to show off their finest clothes. I would think to myself, God doesn’t care what you wear. And then I ended up marrying Neill and was horrified when he went to church in shorts and T-shirt. Go figure!

Let me assure you that as far as I’m concerned, whatever you wear to church is fine with me. Yet we have in our gospel lesson today an example of a man being tossed out of a wedding feast because he was not wearing the right clothes. Let’s see what this story is all about. First of all Jesus starts out—as he has in so many other parables in this book of Matthew—by saying this is what the Kingdom of God is like. A King has prepared a banquet for the wedding of his son. I just came back from a wedding feast for my nephew, fancy, fancy, so I can just imagine what this King’s banquet would have been like. The King sent his servants out twice with invitations and no one came. Listen to this modern interpretation by Rev. Thom Shuman:

the reception

in his off-the-rack tux

and too-tight shoes,



# Deering Community Church

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Jesus fidgets at the door,  
glancing at his watch  
every few minutes  
(always surprised that an  
hour hasn't passed since  
the last time he looked),  
peering, once more,  
down the road  
for signs of the  
stretch limos;

back in the kitchen,  
steam roiling around  
like cumulus clouds,  
Spirit  
mutters to the sous-chef,  
her breath sending the  
chefs de partie  
fluttering around,  
checking sauces,  
keeping salads crisp,  
banging lids and  
turning down flames,  
doing their best to avoid  
her look;



# Deering Community Church

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having polished the flatware  
for the hundredth time,  
and centered the arrangements  
for the last time,  
Abba  
sighs behind the bar,  
watching the fluted champagne  
flatten minute by minute;  
throwing the bar towel down,  
the long-sufferer stomps  
to the back door and  
flings it open, hollering,  
'you cardboard box dwellers,  
you dumpster divers,  
you panhandling pariahs -  
come on in!  
there's plenty for all;  
bring your buddies!'

Okay, so that pretty well explains the first part of the Gospel. King is often used for a metaphor for God. Many scholars feel that the servants are the disciples and those that make excuses for not coming to the banquet are the people that make excuses for not following Jesus or as the readings often say-- those that refuse to accept Jesus as the Messiah. A wedding can be a metaphor for the relationship



# Deering Community Church

Pastor: Barbara Luckett Currie

between God and Israel and the banquet a sign of the covenant between them. Some interpret the last invitation (in nicer terms than Shuman writes) is indicative of God's radical inclusiveness. So what possibly could be the objection for the man that was rejected because he was not properly dressed, not only rejected but thrown out into the darkness, into Hell. The passage ends with "For many are called, but few are chosen."

Getting back to the wedding guest that was called but not chosen, obviously we are talking about spiritual not material type of clothing. What is the metaphor for the wedding robe? The church fathers gave several possibilities: Augustine thought of it as charity. Luther said it was faith. Calvin thought it was good works. There are multiple references in the Bible of being clothed in different ways such as from Colossians 3:12: Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. I would like to use Paul's letter to the Philippians to fill out this clothing metaphor. In this letter of Paul to the Philippians, Paul is at his most intimate. This passage is often called Paul's Letter of Joy. He obviously was very fond of this congregation and wanted to give them words of instruction and comfort. Let's play with Paul's advice to fit our clothing metaphor—what our internal clothing needs to be for us to be both called and chosen. He starts with rejoice. He says rejoice in the Lord and reminds us that God is near. I too want to remind you that God's presence is here today, and God's presence is near to you always. So the first item of clothing is joy, rejoicing in the Lord.

The thing that keeps so many from rejoicing is fear and anxiety. Are any of you out there worrywarts? I had a mother that was one of the most anxious persons I have ever known. In reaction to her, I became extremely calm and unworried. Unfortunately as I grew older a lot of that anxiety has broken through, so I, too,



# Deering Community Church

Pastor: Barbara Luckett Currie

have to work on the anxiety. Not only Paul but Jesus also in his Sermon on the Mount tells his followers not to worry; in Matthew 6 starting at the 25<sup>th</sup> verse: Jesus says, “do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear.” As you can imagine, this scripture has always been one of my favorites.

Let me share another poem with you, this one is by the well known Mary Oliver from her book *Swan*, titled “I Worried.”

I worried a lot.

Will the gardens grow, will the rivers  
flow in the right direction, will the earth turn  
as it was taught, and if not, how shall  
I correct it? Was I right, was I wrong, will I be forgiven,  
can I do better?

Will I ever be able to sing, even the sparrows  
can do it and I am, well,  
hopeless.

Is my eyesight fading or am I just imagining it,  
am I going to get rheumatism,  
lockjaw, dementia?

Finally I saw that worrying had come to nothing.  
And gave it up. And took my old body  
and went out into the morning,  
and sang.

Dear friends, being Christian does not guarantee us a problem free life by any means; however, the way we handle these concerns has a lot to do with our attitude before God. Paul says in every situation –I’m now quoting Philippians in Petersons’ translation, “instead of worrying, pray. Let Petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers; let God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God’s



# Deering Community Church

Pastor: Barbara Luckett Currie

wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.”  
Vv.6b-7

So besides rejoicing and praying, what else does Paul suggest? He says to concentrate on the very best things, the true, the honorable, the just, the pure, the pleasing, whatever is lovely or excellent or praiseworthy. Doing, helping, serving, are some of the best possible ways to regain that deep joy and to be clothed appropriately.

The final thing that Paul recommends is this, “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” Now we know Paul only from the scriptures; however, I bet most of you have someone—a father, a grandmother, a minister—that you admired in terms of living a faith-filled life. So that is another way of clothing ourselves to being acceptable to God, putting into practice those godly qualities we admire in others leading a faith filled life.

Clothing ourselves with all of these recommendations of Paul is not easy but with the Holy Spirit guiding us it is possible. Remember when joy or happiness comes from external things, it can quickly disappear. Joy that lasts is not dependent on the absence of sorrow or pain. The kind of joy Paul is talking about is what Henri Nouwen describes as... “a divine gift that does not leave us during illness, grief, oppression, or persecution. It does not depend on the circumstances of our lives, or even on our momentary feelings.”



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I can remember when one of my social work supervisors asked me how I could stay so joyful. This was a few years after my divorce; I lived with my two children, and he knew that my external life was somewhat of a struggle. However, during this time I was also very much into prayer, meditation and worship. I truly could feel that deep joy that comes from putting my relationship with God first and foremost in my life. Now I certainly have not always been successful in doing this joy and peace thing in all circumstances. Yet I want to share with you that it is possible, and I praise God and thank God for the times when I'm in that place.

So to sum up what to wear in terms of the inner clothing , I would recommend with Paul: work on being less anxious; show your gentleness to all: go to God in prayer asking for what you desire; think about what is true and pure, lovely and praiseworthy, follow the examples of the lives of Jesus and Paul; love and care for each other; and know that joy that lasts is rooted in our eternal, loving, and caring God. So I say to all of you, rejoice always and remember that the Lord is near.  
amen