

The Rev. Erin Hensley

October 15, 2017

The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Matthew 22:1-14, Psalm 23, Isaiah 25:1-9

Dressed for the Party

Jesus seems to be pretty harsh today, doesn't he? If you invited me to your party and I didn't wear the right attire, you wouldn't throw me out would you? And certainly God doesn't throw people into the outer darkness and weeping and gnashing of teeth, especially over what someone wears? The king did invite everyone good, bad, ugly, beautiful, rich, poor, so how can expect people who are poor to wear tuxedos? Is Jesus saying if you don't wear your Sunday best to worship, then stay home?

"By no means!" St. Paul might say. Come wearing clothes he and I would say. "Come and worship;" this is what Jesus said after all to the blind and the lame and even the children as they sang sweet hosannas with joy in the temple (Matthew 21:12-17). You see, the story of the great supper, the story that ends with the kicked out guest in the alleyway, is one Jesus tells to temple leadership. Jesus tells the story of the Great Supper to talk about salvation history, when Christ will come again, heaven comes fully down to earth (Matthew 6:10) and God will be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28). The temple leadership chose what not to wear to such a party. They are dressed to kill, dressed for control, rather than robed up for worship, suited up for the adventure of service.

God has invited the world to this great supper, this abundant feast unfurled on green pastures besides still waters. A celebration in which souls are revived, renewed, and no one is along. A feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear for ALL. A splendid table of abundance and beauty, where crying is no more, where death is no more, where the whole world and the whole hearts dines in peace and joy that springs like flowers.

This is the feast to which we are invited even here and now. This is the feast that emerges in the generosity of God. In the shared meal of holy communion, we experience the real presence of Christ. We experience God with us and us with God and death defeated and abundance shared. We taste and see that God is good in the holy bread and holy wine and the table that has been set by God's holy people, by you. St. Alban's, we are dressed and ready.

The bulletins are prepared the week before Sunday worship, the floral guild buys and arranges the flowers, and the choir rehearses Wednesday and comes early on Sunday. The altar guild comes sets the altar on Saturday morning. The Verger comes in early to open the building, turn the air conditioning on, place flowers in vases, check the books on the altar, and make sure servers are ready to go.

Sunday worship is one of many places that we are dressed for such a party. Consider the casseroles you make for parishioners recovering from surgery. Consider the telling of God's story, our story, to the youngest ones in Godly Play. Think of the mats for those who are homeless knit from strips of plastic bags. Remember the apartments you make into homes for our refugee neighbors. Hold on to the prayers you say for those on the parish prayer lists. And there's the way you listen to a teenager who is trying to find his way. The way you sing and ring so we can hear and love God more. The way you help out in the parish office. The way you lead worship at Onion Creek Senior Center. The

way you pick up a hammer and a nail and roll up your sleeves for a Habitat home. Consider the hospitality you offer, especially to newcomers. The times you see someone you do not yet know, introduce yourself, and see the face of Jesus as you begin to get to know him over coffee. Picture the raucous laughter and tender tears you have shared as we journey together, doing the best we can to love God and love neighbor.

Today is the kick off of our annual season of giving. This season is a season of giving that emerges from the generosity of God, the abundance of the great supper, the joyous revelry of the messianic feast. Today and the weeks ahead are a time set aside to ask ourselves what we want to wear to God's party. We are all invited and we have all said "yes." We are here together on this Lord's day pondering what to wear and what not to wear given the invitation. Do we want to amp up the design on our dress? Tone down the brass cufflinks in order to highlight the fancy new shoes? We are invited to the messianic feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear. We've replied yes to the invitation, so now what do we want to wear? What will make you feel fabulous? Joyful? Able to dance the night away?

Here's what I'm going to wear to God's party through St. Alban's fashion line in 2018:

- Sam and I will wear 11% of our of salaries to St. Alban's design.
- I will wear glasses to see everybody more clearly and lovingly at the party.
- I will wear a pocket protector to keep all those pens and pencils for sermon and Christian education preparation,
- fun pants for taking the party more seriously than I take myself,
- and of course, my dancing boots.

God's supper is so great, the feast is so abundant, so how can we keep from singing? Wearing funeral attire simply does not match the occasion. The Gospel of God in Christ Jesus is good news-news that feeds, that heals, that welcomes, that goes out into the world and says, "Come. Come and worship. Come and dance. You were not made to be a wallflower, friend." With such an invitation, how do you want to come with joy to meet our Lord? What will you wear? What will you share in joy for joy? *Amen.*