

The Invitation and the Wedding Garment

October 11th

Matthew 22:1–14 · Psalm 23 · Philippians 4:7

Last weekend, Kornelius and I attended a wedding.

And if you have ever been to a wedding, you know that there are many things to think about. What am I going to wear? What should I bring? What will the ceremony be like? And, of course, people are wondering what will the bride wear?

There is so much preparation, so many details, so many things we want to get right.

But when the day finally arrives, we realize that the most important thing is not what we wear, how the decorations look, or whether everything goes according to plan.

The most important thing is love. The love that has brought two people together. The love they have found in one another and the promise they make to share their lives. And the love of the family and friends gathered around them—the community that celebrates with them and promises to walk with them through life. Last weekend I got aware again that a wedding is not just about one beautiful day. It is about the life that follows. The ordinary days, the difficult days, the moments of joy and the moments when we need someone to stand beside us. And perhaps that is why weddings are such powerful celebrations. They remind us that love is never just about two people. Love creates community. It brings people together. It invites us to share in something bigger than ourselves. Our Gospel reading today is also about a wedding. Jesus tells us about a king who prepares a wedding banquet for his son.

Everything is ready, but the invited guests refuse to come. So the king sends his servants out into the streets to invite everyone they can find, both good and bad. And finally, the wedding hall is full. Everyone is invited. But then comes the part of the story that makes us stop and wonder. The king notices a guest who is not wearing a wedding garment. And that guest is thrown out. Wait a minute. Everyone was invited! The servants went out into the streets and brought people in. These people had not been preparing for a royal wedding. They were simply going about their lives when the invitation reached them.

So why does this one guest get excluded? What exactly is the wedding garment?

The truth is, we do not know for certain. Perhaps the wedding garment represents our inner attitude, the way we respond to God's invitation. Perhaps it represents the values we carry in our hearts: compassion, humility, kindness, and a willingness to love others.

Perhaps it represents the difference between simply showing up and allowing ourselves to be changed by the love we encounter. Or perhaps the wedding garment is something even deeper. Perhaps it represents the true love that cannot be reduced to outward appearances, religious words, or simply being in the right place at the right time. We cannot say with certainty what Jesus intended this garment to mean. And I think it is worth allowing the question to remain open. Because the question leads us somewhere important.

If everyone is invited, what does it mean to accept the invitation?

We know how easy it is to focus on appearances. At a wedding, we think about what we should wear. We want to look appropriate. We want to belong.

And sometimes we do the same thing in our faith. We wonder whether we believe enough, whether we have done enough, whether we are good enough to belong at God's table.

But look at how the story begins. The invitation comes first. The king sends his servants out to find people who never expected to be invited. God's invitation is not a prize for the people who have everything figured out. It is an invitation to receive God's love and grace.

And that brings me to another possibility. What if the wedding garment is not something we can provide for ourselves? What if we cannot make ourselves worthy of the banquet through our good deeds, our correct beliefs, or our perfect lives? What if we need someone to give us the garment? The New Testament offers us a beautiful image in the words of Paul: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." (Galatians 3:27)

We have clothed ourselves with Christ. Could it be that Jesus himself is, in a way, the wedding garment we need?

Not because Jesus is the guest who gets thrown out, but because Jesus is the One through whom we are welcomed into God's presence. The One who covers our failures with grace, who meets us in our imperfection, and who makes a place for us at the table.

We do not have to manufacture our own worthiness. We are clothed in Christ's love.

And when we begin to understand that, something changes. We no longer have to spend our lives trying to prove that we deserve to belong. We can begin to live out of the love we have already received. We can become more compassionate, more generous, more willing to forgive. We can make room for people who are different from us. We can become a community that carries one another through life's difficult moments.

That brings us back to the wedding we attended last weekend.

The love we celebrated there was not just about how the couple looked that day or how beautifully everything was arranged. It was about the love they have found in one another, the love of the people surrounding them, and the promise that they will not have to face life alone. And I believe that this is one way we experience God's love, too.

God gathers us around a table. God welcomes us into a community. God gives us people who walk beside us when we are struggling, who celebrate with us when we are joyful, and who remind us of love when we have difficulty seeing it ourselves.

Psalm 23 gives us that beautiful image of God preparing a table for us.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." Even in the darkest valley, we are not alone.

God walks with us. God restores our souls. God prepares a table before us.

Notice that the psalm does not promise that we will never walk through a valley. It promises that the Shepherd will be with us there. And perhaps this is another part of the wedding garment: learning to live with the confidence that we are loved, even when life is difficult, even when we feel inadequate, even when we do not have all the answers.

We do not have to earn our place at God's table. We can receive the love that is offered to us. And then we are invited to share that love with others. Because God's invitation is not meant to end with us. If Christ has welcomed us, we can welcome others. If Christ has shown us mercy, we can show mercy. If Christ has made room for us, we can make room for our neighbors. The wedding garment might be our inner attitude. It might be the values we live by. It might be the love that becomes visible in our actions.

And perhaps it is all of these things, growing out of the love of Christ that we have received.

We may not know exactly what Jesus meant by the wedding garment. But we know that God's invitation is real. We know that grace is a gift. And we know that love calls us into a life that reaches beyond ourselves. And when we struggle to live that life, we can remember the words from Philippians: "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." God's peace does not mean that everything will always be easy. It does not mean that we will never have questions or doubts. It means that even when we do not understand everything, we are held by a love greater than our understanding. So perhaps the most important question today is not whether we have found the perfect wedding garment. Perhaps the question is whether we are willing to accept the invitation, to let ourselves be clothed in Christ's love, and to share that love with the people around us. Last weekend, at that wedding, we were reminded that the most important thing was love: the love between two people, the love of the community that surrounds them, and the love that carries them into the future.

And today, Jesus reminds us that God's invitation is wider than we can imagine.

There is room at the table. May we trust the One who invites us. May we allow Christ's love to shape our hearts. And may we become a community in which others can experience that same love. "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Amen.