

Matthew 22:1-14

October 11, 2020

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Once upon a time, there was a young man who fell in love with a beautiful woman. What made this woman beautiful in his eyes was not that she had fair skin and long hair, that she dressed in the latest fashion or did her makeup just right. She was beautiful, because of the way she treated others.

The young man would watch her from his window as she took care of the needy and loved the loveless. She was kind to everyone and never let a harsh word escape her lips. As young children walked by she would give them words of encouragement, and she would give shoes to those who needed them.

Watching the young woman love others, the young man was distressed, because he knew that if she really knew who he was, she could never love him. He cheated his friends at cards. He drank way too much. He cursed like a sailor, and for the most part he really didn't care about anyone but himself, outside of this young woman that is.

Desperately in love with this young woman, the young man decided that if he was going to be able to know her, he would have to put on a mask. He would have to pretend to be someone else whenever he was around her. He would act as if he actually cared about the poor and needy. He would pretend that he cared about what happened to these little street urchins. He would put on a mask and play the part of someone else.

Taking courage with his mask on, the young man went to the woman and spent time with her and those who were in need. He gave food to the hungry and shoes to the children in need. He smiled and listened to other people's stories. It took all of the effort he had, but he managed to pull off the ruse.

Not long after he began helping the young woman, he asked her to marry him. The more time he spent with her, the more he wanted to be with her. When she said yes, he just about blew apart into thousands of pieces out of pure joy.

Not wanting to lose her, the young man continued to wear the mask. He never ever wanted her to know who he really was. He was so worried that she would be disappointed and leave him. He couldn't bear the thought.

After 60 years of marriage, the man became ill. It was pancreatic cancer, and there wasn't anything anyone could do about it. It had progressed too far.

Feeling guilty for having lied to his wife all of these years, the man decided he had to take the mask off so that his wife could see who he really is. He needed her to know and he needed her forgiveness.

As he lay on the bed, near death, he told his wife how he had been wearing a mask all of these years. He told her how he really wasn't the man he had pretended to be. He wanted her to see him for real. He wanted to apologize.

As he took off the mask, he had great shame and felt horribly guilty about the 60 plus years of lies. He cried as he revealed himself to his wife.

His wife hugged him and told him, "I've always known who you are. You are the man I married all of those years ago. I've always loved you."

And, then she took a mirror and showed the man his face. To his great surprise, his face had changed to that of the mask. He became the man he was pretending to be all of these years.

In Jesus' parable, which he tells to the chief priest and Pharisees, a king invites important guests, who refuse to show up to the wedding banquet of his son. Basically, that's the chief priests and Pharisees not recognizing the good news of Jesus being the son of God.

The parable goes on with the slaves going and collecting all the people they can find, both good and bad. These people were the least, last, and lowly by the standards of the community, obviously, because they weren't invited in the first place.

Upon entering the party hall, all of the guests were given free party clothes to put on in celebration of the king's son, but one man refused the gift. He refused to put on the party hat. He refused to celebrate, which clearly did not make the king very happy. So, the man got kicked out of the party. The weeping and gnashing of teeth come when he realizes what he is missing out on.

I mean, don't you feel bad when you know a great party is going on and you're on the outside looking in. I weep. I gnash my teeth. I like a good party. Especially ones with cake.

In baptism, we are clothed with Christ. Christ is put on us. On all of us – the good and the bad alike. How amazing is that? God doesn't prejudge us as being worthy or not. We are just clothed. We are clothed as Jesus.

We are clothed in God's love. We are clothed in God's mercy and forgiveness. In baptism, we are clothed for the kingdom. We are clothed for the sake of others. We are clothed to be Christ in the world.

In baptism, we are like the young man who out of love for another puts on a mask, and like that young man, we find that the longer we wear Christ the more we become like Christ. And it all starts with love and is responded to with love.

In baptism, we are clothed in love, and that clothing changes us, because when we are clothed with Christ at baptism, we are enshrouded by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God's unending love for all of creation.

Every time we remember our baptism. Every time we remember that we are clothed in Christ. We are stirred to contemplate all of the good that God is, all the good that God has done and is doing, and we are inspired to do God's work of reconciliation in the world here and now. When we do those things, the God of peace joins us right where we are.

This past week, ballots were sent out to us here in Colorado.

All of the mental health experts have been saying that this election has been super stressful on everyone. It's bad enough we're in the midst of a pandemic.

So, I encourage you, before you vote, to spend some time contemplating God's great love, so that the God of peace will join you when you vote. Remember that you are clothed with Christ and that the Holy Spirit is with you, and don't forget your baptismal covenant to seek justice and peace in all the world, and to honor and serve all people as Christ.

Remember - Nothing we do is outside of Christ, because we are clothed with Christ 24/7.

The next 20 some days are going to be excruciatingly stressful for a lot of people, but it need not be so for us. The God of peace is with us, loving us in the midst of it all.

God loved us before we were baptized, and God will love us long after we slap on our "I voted" stickers.

Like the young man in the story, love changes us. Clothed in love, we become love.

And, like the young woman in the story, God sees us for who we really are and loves us completely and fully.

God is love and it is God's love that changes the whole world into the Kingdom of God.

In baptism, we are clothed in love in order to be a part of God's mission.

Thanks be to God. Amen.