

Dorset South & West Circuit
Sunday October 15th
Are You Properly Dressed?
Written Service. Prepared by Revd Jean Quick



Call to Worship

Praise to the LORD - LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done wonderful things. Isaiah 25:1

STF 88

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!

O my soul, praise him, for he is thy health and salvation!

All ye who hear, brothers and sisters, draw near, praise him in glad adoration.

Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and defend thee;

surely his goodness and mercy here daily attend thee:

ponder anew what the Almighty can do, who with his love doth befriend thee.

Praise to the Lord, who doth nourish thy life and restore thee,
fitting thee well for the tasks that are ever before thee,
then to thy need he like a mother doth speed,
spreading the wings of grace o'er thee.

Praise to the Lord, who, when darkness of sin is abounding,
who, when the godless do triumph, all virtue confounding,
sheddeth his light, chaseth the horrors of night,
saints with his mercy surrounding.

Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore him!
All that hath life and breath, come now with praises before him!
Let the amen sound from his people again:
gladly for aye we adore him.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Loving God, we praise you, not only when the sun is shining, but when rain seems endless.

For just as a seed needs both sun and rain if it is to grow, so faith becomes stronger, lives become more fruitful, if we root them in the rich and solid earth of your love.

Forgive us for the times we have grumbled this past week. When we have been too mindful of our own wants to acknowledge your gracious gifts to us. Reclothe us in an attitude that reflects your love and mercy. **Amen**

Bible Reading: Matthew 22:1-14 The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

"Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.'

"But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

"Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

"But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, 'How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?' The man was speechless. "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

"For many are invited, but few are chosen."

Reflection: Are You Properly Dressed?

Have you ever gone to a social function and found that you were inappropriately dressed?

Suppose you get an invitation to an afternoon garden party. How exciting you are careful to put on your best dress and high heels or suit and tie. You arrive to find everyone in jeans and t shirts gathered around the barbecue. Whoops wrong image of a garden party and how embarrassing.

I'll never forget the time I came off night shift as a serving airwoman. I was so tired I fell asleep in my fully covering white petticoat. The girl in the room opposite had just lit a cigarette and not been careful about her lighter. I awoke to the fire alarm and the room opposite mine was on fire. Fortunately (or not) I grabbed a fire extinguisher and managed to put out the flames. The RAF duty officer arrived in time to witness the last wisps of smoke and the sight of me covered in black smoke, including my once white petticoat and bare feet. I will never forget his outrage as he roared, "Airwoman you are improperly dressed!" No word of thanks for saving the WRAF accommodation or any subsequent commendation, just a telling off; which was probably more about his embarrassment. I hope it's the nearest I will ever get to, 'the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

That does seem like a harsh verse in our scripture reading today along with, 'many are called but few chosen'. One can almost imagine the worst depiction of the hell fire and brimstone preachers, frightening their congregations into submission with frequent bangs on the pulpit to underscore their words of warning. Indeed the passage also begins with a frightening picture of a host killing and burning the homes of those who refused his invitation. We have all had experiences of inviting people to an event and they say they are coming but don't turn up. We don't go around to their house to vent our anger. So what does this passage mean and how can it possibly reflect the love of God?

Firstly. It is easy to misunderstand the word "many" in the New Testament, because it has slightly different meanings in Greek and in English. In both languages, it refers to a large group. In English, "many" is restrictive, but in Greek it is inclusive.

In other words, if I say "many of the people came" in English, it implies that most of them did not. If I said the equivalent of "many of the people came" in Greek, it would imply that practically everyone did.

We know God's invitation of salvation is to everyone and we would not want to think it's just for a few.

However there is another problem the passage says, 'few are chosen'.

If you think about all the invitations that come through your front door, how many of those unsolicited pieces of mail do you respond to? You can have it all, at a price. Do you choose to respond to the offers of the new conservatory, or a chance to win the postcode lottery, or to order a half price pizza and so on! But I guess most of the offers go unchosen, consigned to the rubbish bin.

Let me ask you another question. If you were to imagine your self in the story Jesus told, which of the characters would you be? I imagine that is why the more challenging words are so frightening, because we don't want to be the one cast out into the darkness. Yet God sends us an unsolicited invitation to his eternal banquet. Something we don't expect to be worthy of. What do you do with this free offer of grace? Many are invited but sadly few respond and you have to respond to be one of the chosen. We have to choose to respond to be counted among the chosen.

I guess that's why in the story Jesus uses such exaggerated examples about the people who for one reason or another didn't come to the wedding banquet prepared for his son.

I remember some one rewriting this story but using the image of soap instead of the excuses. It really helped to see how sad and ridiculous the excuses given for not engaging with Christ are. 'I would use soap but I have to do xyz first.' The kingdom of God is offered to all and we must respond, not make excuses. The second part of the parable underlines that it won't be about how good we think we have to make ourselves. The servants are instructed to go to 'all the people they could find, **the bad** as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.'

But apart from responding to the invitation they had to be properly dressed. In the Bible, clothes have a symbolic meaning They're a sign of being dressed in the righteousness of God.

How can someone from the highway and byway of life be expected to have the means to be properly dressed?

Weddings have changed and perhaps people do go to weddings in much more relaxed outfits now. However I think that everyone will want to make some effort. To be clean and proud of what they have chosen to wear.

In Jesus' day, guests coming to a royal banquet were expected to wear festal garments. For the wealthy, that meant embroidered robes and gowns adorned with precious jewels. For the poor, it meant the best clothes you had, freshly washed. If you could afford it, you'd wear white, and, if you couldn't, you'd wear as close to white as possible. The implication is that the guest who was not wearing a festal garment had come for the wrong motive. He wasn't there to honour the king and celebrate the marriage of the prince, he was there just for the free food and drink. The way he dressed could even be interpreted as a sign of disdain. The king had every reason to throw him out.

That's how I hear this passage speaking to us today. God is calling us, now, more than ever, to "put on Christ" and bear witness to his grace and love in the world around us.

Paul In his Letter to the Colossians writes, “*put on the new man, who is being renewed in knowledge after the image of his Creator...as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, humility, and perseverance... Above all these things, walk in love, which is the bond of perfection.*” (Colossians 3:5-14)

To be clothed in the righteousness of God is to be immersed in the teachings of Jesus and filled with his Spirit, just as Paul told the Ephesians:

‘Therefore, put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having the utility belt of truth buckled around your waist, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having fitted your feet with the preparation of the Good News of peace; above all, taking up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.’ (Ephesians 6:11-17)

The Good News is that God supplies all the clothes we need to fight the sinfulness of injustice and oppression, self-centredness and greed. He gives them to us as a free gift through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The catch is we have to be willing to wear them. Sadly we too often hear critical comments about the church, “and they say they are Christians!”. I wonder if we have forgotten at times to put on the right ‘garments’?

The question’s this passage asks are, have you accepted God’s gracious invitation and are you daily putting on the right spiritual clothes that honour the kingdom of God?

One last confession about me being improperly dressed oops! I went to take a small village chapel’s Women’s fellowship meeting. It was a hot sunny day so I went in a nice cool top and skirt. No clerical collar. One lovely gentle lady quietly asked me, over the cup of tea, if I felt the smallness of the group meant I didn’t feel they were worth my wearing my collar? I don’t recall what my talk was about, but I have never forgotten the lesson I learnt that day.

Wearing a clerical collar certainly makes you stand out. It also makes you think twice: People watch to see how you handle various situations. You’re supposed to set a good example. But this holds true for everyone who walks in the footsteps of Jesus. We’re called to live by a higher standard than the world around us. When we don’t, we forfeit our witness. When we do, others see the Spirit of God at work in us and are encouraged to follow our example. Jesus told his disciples, “Therefore, by their fruits you will know them.” Matthew 7:20

I’m not suggesting that you wear a clerical collar, but I would like for you to think of some tangible way you can, in Paul’s words, “put on Christ.” It’s not all that far-fetched: People wear pink ribbons to indicate their support of breast cancer research.

Soon we will wear poppies in remembrance for those who sacrificed their lives for us. What if you were to do something creative to distinguish yourself as a disciple of Jesus Christ – not to call attention to yourself, but to let others know – and to remind yourself – that you belong to Christ?

We all know how embarrassing it is to show up at a social function inappropriately dressed. What we need to remember is that the greatest social function of all – the Kingdom of God – is here and now, and we’re expected to dress accordingly.

So, put on the garments of Christ. Clothe yourself in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and love ... and in so doing, honour and glorify the king who invites you and everyone to his son’s banquet.

STF 495

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
forgive our foolish ways;
re clothe us in our rightful mind,
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise.”

In simple trust like theirs who heard
beside the Syrian sea
the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word
rise up and follow thee.

O sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with thee
the silence of eternity,
interpreted by love!

With that deep hush subduing all
our words and works that drown
the tender whisper of thy call,
as noiseless let thy blessing fall
as fell thy manna down.

Drop thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire
thy coolness and thy balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still small voice of calm!

Prayers of intercession

We use the symbolic spiritual clothes to guide our prayers:

Let us pray for all those who need to feel the compassionate love of God. We think of those in the news this week. Facing any kind of trouble or hardship. **Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.**

We thank you for those who show kindness by their chosen careers. We thank you for all caregivers and pray for those especially who are known to us. **Lord in your mercy hear our prayer**

In this sometimes angry world, we pray for a sense of humility, especially for those in influential and leadership roles. **Lord in your mercy hear our prayer**

We marvel at the gentleness, of those who are shining examples to us. Give to us patience and love so that we might be reflections of your love to all we will meet in the coming days **Lord in your mercy hear our prayer. Amen.**

We say the Lord's Prayer

STF 504

May the mind of Christ my Saviour
live in me from day to day,
by his love and power controlling
all I do or say.

May the word of God dwell richly
in my heart from hour to hour,
so that all may see I triumph
only through his power.

May the peace of God my Father
rule my life in everything,

that I may be calm to comfort
sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me,
as the waters fill the sea;
him exalting, self forgetting -
this is victory.

May I run the race before me,
strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus
as I onward go.

Benediction based on Philippians 4

Rejoice in the Lord always. Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. Know that the Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, whatever is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things. And the God of peace will be with you. **Amen**

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What's the difference
between a well-dressed
man on a unicycle and a
poorly-dressed man on a
bicycle?

Attire.

Let us put on the right spiritual attire.