

DRESSED FOR THE OCCASION

Matthew 22:1-14

Preached by Dr. Cahill

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Being appropriately dressed for the occasion is always a high priority for people who want to make a good impression, whether you lived two thousand years ago or today. Even in our more casual contemporary culture the old saying, “clothes make the man (or woman),” still rings true.

Emily Post made a living setting the standard of good taste. Her best selling book *Etiquette* was must reading for acceptance in polite society. In the 1945 edition of her book she wrote:

“Clothes not only add to our appearance, they are our appearance. The first impression that we make upon others depends entirely upon what we wear and how we wear it. Manners and speech are noted afterward and character is discerned last of all.

...in the world of smart society, clothes represent not only our ticket of admission, but our contribution to the effect of a party. What makes a brilliant party? Clothes. Good clothes. A frumpy party is nothing more or less than a collection of badly dressed persons.”

Do you think Jesus consulted Emily Post before he taught the Parable of the Wedding Banquet? Let’s review:

A king is hosting his son’s wedding. As was the custom he sent out his servants to remind the guests, who already received their invitations, that the big day was here. The food was prepared, the table was set, the caskets of wine were waiting to be tapped. All that was missing were the guests. But they couldn’t be bothered. They had better things to do, like managing their farms and businesses. But the king wouldn’t take no for an answer. He sent his slaves again to them, this time almost pleading, “Look, everything is ready and waiting for you. I’ve spared no expense, we’ll all have a great time together. Won’t you please come?”

Some of the guests just brushed the slaves off and mocked the invitation while the others mistreated and even killed the messengers. Naturally the king was furious. His royal subjects were not only rejecting him, but added insult to injury by violating the code of hospitality. Their arrogance could not stand, so the king sent soldiers to punish them.

But this didn’t solve the king’s problem. He still had a wedding with no guests. Since his former friends couldn’t make it, he decided to open it up to anybody else who wanted to come. He ordered his servants, “Go therefore into the main streets and invite anyone you find.” And so they did, and soon the banquet hall was filled. The party was rolling.

Apparently these last minute guests who received their unexpected invitations ran home and put on their best clothes. Wouldn’t you do the same? If you were at the Home Depot in work clothes and suddenly you were invited to a state dinner at the White House, wouldn’t you drop everything, run home and put on your best suit of clothes? Of course you would. You’d want to be dressed for the occasion, you’d want to fit in, make a good impression. What’s more,

it's a sign of respect. If you are singled out to be an honored guest, you would want to honor your host by being your best.

But there was one guest at the party who apparently took his invitation for granted. He didn't wear his best suit of clothes. Mind you, Matthew doesn't say he was a poor beggar who couldn't afford to dress appropriately; and it's not that he didn't own a wedding robe, it wasn't an expensive piece of clothing, just about everybody had one, and even if he didn't own one, he could have easily borrowed one from a friend. No, this guy had an attitude problem. Yes, he accepted the king's invitation, but he couldn't care less about showing gratitude or the proper respect by dressing up. So he just showed up. Emily Post would have branded him "a vulgarian."

Notice when the king confronted him with, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?" the vulgarian was speechless. He had no excuse. Face to face with his king he knew he was unworthy to be his guest, because he didn't care enough to dress for the occasion, so he was thrown out on his ear.

Don't think for one minute Jesus was joining the fashion police. Jesus couldn't care less about your outward appearances. In fact he once even accused the proper religious people of his day of being "white washed tombs" squeaky clean on the outside, but rotten on the inside. So, what is Jesus really concerned about? Repentance. Changing your ways. Transformation.

Remember how the first set of "honored" guests treated their invitations? With mockery. It seems incomprehensible. Jesus' listeners must have been thinking, "Rejecting a royal invitation to a royal wedding? Are these guys nuts? I'd never pass something like that up. It would be a thrill that comes once in a lifetime!"

But Jesus' point is, "You too are passing up a royal invitation, a thrill that lasts a lifetime and beyond, whenever you ignore God's invitation to friendship.

A day never passes when one way or another that still small voice from deep within doesn't say to you, "Follow me." Remember why the king's "friends" refused the invitation? They were too busy. They had their precious daily routines to follow. They couldn't care less that they were singled out and honored with a royal invitation. So the question, "How could they be so ungrateful?" is then redirected back to us, "How can we be so ungrateful when God invites you and me to be with him now and forever?"

If you had to sum up in one sentence the main point of this parable it would be this: God wants you to take him seriously. Think how God must feel when you and I accept his invitation to the full, abundant life but then we take it for granted, it's not up there on our priority list. How would you feel if you invited friends to your house for a party and they seemed less than enthusiastic about coming, and when they finally arrived give the impression they'd rather be somewhere else? It hurts doesn't it? Do you wonder if God hurts?

The king in the parable wanted his friends to celebrate and share his love for his son. God wants you to celebrate and share in his love for his son. That's why he invites you into the full, abundant life. So when the invitation comes be ready to dress for the occasion.

You are here this morning because you want to take God seriously and you don't want to take his invitation for granted. On the other hand you realize, too often, you do take God for granted and you don't take him as seriously as you know you should. You have too many other important things on your plate, your career, your problems, your family. How can you take God seriously when you have to take all this other stuff seriously?

One word: Stewardship. You are empowered by God to be a faithful steward of your life. You have the ability to set your priorities and make the right commitments. You have it within your power to make decisions that will set the tone and direction of your life. Because you have free will, you can freely choose to seek first the Kingdom and watch everything else fall into place, otherwise life becomes a laundry list of trivial pursuits.

Stewardship is taking good care of what God has given you. God has given you a soul, natural talents, spiritual gifts and the potential and the opportunities to live large. The question is, will you care enough to dress for the occasion so you can honor God?

Dressing for the occasion means being properly clothed so that when the King confronts you at his son's wedding you'll feel like a welcomed guest and not a party crasher. So what are you supposed to wear to this brilliant party God is throwing?

You won't find any answers in The Gospel According to Emily Post, but you will find direction in the Bible. In his letter to the Colossians Paul writes, "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience... Above all clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony (Colossians 3:12;14)

The problem with the guy the king kicked out of the party was that he was clothed in ingratitude, arrogance and self-centeredness. He came to the party thinking he could get away with it, but then he was found out while the others who went home and changed their clothes were welcomed.

When Jesus calls you to be with him there is the expectation that you'll change and change begins with a decision.

Your dirty old clothes, your old ways, need to come off. Listen again to Paul. "...seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothes yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge, according to the image of the creator." (Colossians 3:9-10) In other words you are given the new clothes, your new self, renewed in the image of God. God himself clothes you in all the graces of his kingdom. You get the makeover to end all makeovers, clothed in the love of Christ.

Listen again with new ears to Emily Post, "...in the world of smart society, clothes represent not only our ticket of admission, but our contribution to the effect of the party. What makes a brilliant party? Clothes, good clothes."

When we all put on compassion and kindness for one another, when we are humble and patient to a fault and when we love like Jesus, then we are dressed for the occasion and ready to make our contribution to the effect of the party.

You're all invited, so get all dressed up in your Sunday best and get ready to be in the best company ever at the most brilliant party ever.

What makes the party brilliant? Clothes. Good clothes that show you're glad you've come.