

15 October 2023
Pentecost 20

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Royal Robes, Royal Joy”

Text: Philippians 4:4-13; Matthew 22:1-14; Isaiah 25:6-9

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Thus said the apostle Paul in the Epistle we heard today. Which are words I need to hear. Words of admonition, of encouragement, I need. Because while I don't know about you, my mind doesn't seem to work that way.

Instead of ***anything worthy of praise***, my mind instead tends to dwell on things *criticized* - how others have criticized me, or how I criticize others.

Instead of ***lovely***, my mind is often filled with how I have been unlovely. Those times when my ugly, selfish, sinful side has come out, and I've done things I now wish I hadn't, or said things I wish I could take back.

Instead of ***honorable***, my mind keeps remembering those things I regret, and how I wish I could go back and do those things again. Better. More helpful. More loving.

Instead of ***pure***, my mind thinks impure thoughts. Instead of ***just***, *jealousy*. Instead of virtue, vice. And I could go on, but you get the point.

Now, I don't want my mind to be that way! I want to remember and think about the good and forget the bad. But that doesn't seem to be the way it is. Maybe for you, too. And I don't just mean things from the past year or so, but my mind dredges up things from many years ago, all the way back to when I was a teenager, and maybe younger. Why do I remember *those* things? Why does it seem so easy to remember the bad and so hard to think about the ***true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy***? I wish forgiveness meant not just that my sins were wiped out before God, but that they are wiped out from my own memory as well!

But maybe it's good they're not. To keep humbling me. To keep me repenting. To keep me from being like the man in the parable we heard from Jesus today, who thought he

could attend the wedding feast without the proper clothes. Who thought he had arrived! That he was good enough the way he was. He wasn't, and what he got for that belief was ***being bound hand and foot and cast into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.***

But God doesn't want that. For anyone. How do we know? Well, from the king in the parable. The king was filled with joy at the marriage of his son. So he held a feast. And no ordinary feast, this. This was a royal feast. A feast, as they say, fit for a king! There would be only the best of the best, and that in abundance. It would be the talk of the town. And as we heard from Isaiah, this is the kind of feast the Lord is preparing for us. A celebration with joy unimaginable.

Except some did not want to come. Either because they didn't like the king and didn't want to be with him, or thought they had better things to do, more important things to do. They couldn't take time out of their busy schedules to celebrate with the king. This doesn't make the king happy, but his joy is so great that he cannot not celebrate! So he invites more people, from everywhere. Both good people and bad people - it doesn't matter who they are. The king wants them at his feast. They don't have to be good enough. They don't have to have the right credentials or clothes. Just come. The king will take care of the rest.

And he does. But then another twist . . . that one man who was there with no wedding garment. It wasn't because he was too poor or just couldn't get one. The king provided them. But he wouldn't wear it. He rejected the king's generosity. He would come and be there on his own terms, wearing his own clothes, not the king's. But that's not the way it works . . . You must have the king's wedding garments for the king's wedding feast.

This is what the kingdom of heaven is like, Jesus says. The kingdom of heaven which is the marriage feast of Christ and His Bride, the Church. Or as we say in the liturgy, as you will hear again in a bit, *the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which has no end*. And you are invited! All people are invited. Our heavenly Father, the King of the universe, wants to share His joy with all people. And it is a feast and joy that starts now, and that will never end.

But sadly, some people don't come. They don't like God and His Word, they think they have better things to do, more important things to do. They look for joy in other things and places and people. Which is sad. It's not what God wants. God wants all people to be saved, all people to come to the feast! And His invitation is still going out, to people everywhere, good and bad. It doesn't matter who you are. The King wants you at His feast.

There is only this one stipulation: **you must have the King's wedding garment.**

Now, in our day and age, many people might hear or read this and think: *What's the big deal? What difference does that make? It's just clothing.* Because our attitudes toward clothing have changed. Casual Fridays at work have become casual everydays, as is what most people wear on airplanes, to restaurants, to church, and other places people used to dress up for. And this even before the pandemic, when people started working from home in their pajamas. Comfort is the name of the game now. So this fuss about clothing? It must be just another case of a stuffy, old fashioned, doesn't-get-us, God.

But it's just the opposite, actually. God does get us. He knows us, in fact, better than we know ourselves. My mind might keep remembering all my sins and shortcomings and things I don't want to remember and wish I could forget, but God knows all that *and more!* He knows all the sins I do forget! And all the sin I've done that I didn't even know or realize was sin, or that I've done so much I don't even think of it as sin anymore. That's the problem. That's who I am. And so based on who I am, I cannot be at the wedding feast. I cannot be in the presence of God, the King. I am unworthy.

But still God wants me there, and so God clothes me. We sang of this in the Introit this morning: ***he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness.*** And that righteousness you and I are now clothed with is the righteousness of Jesus. So that when our heavenly Father looks at us, He doesn't see the ugly, twisted, selfish, covered-with-filth sinner that I remember and can't seem to forget. No, when our Heavenly Father looks at us, **He sees Jesus.** He sees His righteousness. For Jesus has clothed me and covered me with Himself. So I can have a place at the feast. Without that? Without Jesus? ***Bind [me] hand and foot and cast [me] into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*** And that is, as we know from other places in the Scriptures, a description of hell. That's where I'm going, on my own. Without Jesus. Without being clothed by Him, or in Him. But with Him is joy, and the feast unimaginable. A feast not just fit for a king, but fit for God! A feast without end.

And that feast and those clothes Jesus provided for us when He Himself was **stripped** of His clothes and He was ***bound hand and foot with nails*** and when He was ***cast out into the darkness*** and forsakenness of the cross. That place we deserve, He took. So that place He had, we could have. He taking our unrighteousness and giving us His righteousness. He the Bridegroom who laid down His life for His Bride, for His Church, for us, for all people, that we be His and live in His kingdom of peace and joy, now and forever. For He didn't just lay down His life for us, He took it up again, He rose from the dead, that we be not widows, but joyful, dearly loved Brides. Loved beyond what we deserve or could ever imagine.

So still the invitation is going out to all the world - come to the feast! But it is not *come as you are*. It is come as He is. Come in Jesus. Clothed in Him and His righteousness. **Come** to the waters of baptism and be washed and clothed. **Come** to the words of the

Gospel and the Absolution, and be clothed with His forgiveness. **Come** to the Supper to feast on the Body and Blood of Jesus and be clothed with His righteousness. There are wedding garments enough for all. They are yours, by grace through faith.

And thank God they are! That God doesn't look at all the stuff my mind remembers, but sees you and me in Jesus. And that all the stuff I remember and all the sins I keep adding to them that keeps me coming back to Jesus, to receive from Him the forgiveness and righteousness I need. That I know that on my own, I have no place at the heavenly banquet. But with Jesus, in Jesus, clothed with Jesus, I have a place.

So when Paul said to think about all those things that are *true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy*? And as I said, my mind keeps remembering all the stuff that is not? When we come here, **we do**. For when we come here, we think of Jesus. And Jesus is all those things Paul said. I am not! But He is. He is *true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy*. With that list Paul is directing outside of ourselves, to think of Jesus. And then by grace through faith in Him, that is what you and I are, too. What we could never be on our own, we are, in Jesus.

And then we can do that other thing Paul said as well: *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice*. And rejoice we do, here, in His gifts. And rejoice we will, when we finally arrive at the heavenly feast, in the joy of the Lord, forever. When finally, my mind will think of nothing else. Just the joy of a wedding day. The joy of Bridegroom and Bride. So come and be fed. Come be forgiven and clothed. Come and rejoice!

With the joy of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.