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Isaiah 61-10-11

Epiphany 1 — 11 January 2015

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Old Testament lesson from the Book of the prophet Isaiah, which was read earlier:

I will rejoice greatly in the LORD,
My soul will exult in my God;
For He has clothed me with garments of salvation,
He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness,
As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction: It is said that when we meet people we have never met before, we have less than a minute – less than 60 seconds – to make an impression. Usually, that first impression is a lasting impression. Whether it is a good impression – and I trust most of us want to make a good impression – or a bad impression, it takes quite a bit to reverse that original opinion others makes of us.

One of the first things people notice is how we are clothed. That is nothing new. In fact, Shakespeare commented on it when he wrote “Hamlet.” In Act 1, Polonius gives some advice to his son, Laretes, who is going to Paris. In part, Polonius says:

Costly thy habit [that is, dress] as thy purse can buy,
But not expressed in fancy – rich, not gaudy.
For the apparel oft proclaims the man. (Hamlet, I.iii.70-73)

What Shakespeare is saying when he penned, “For the apparel of proclaims the man,” is put quite simply: clothes make the man. If we bring that up-to-date a bit, we would say: clothes make the man or the woman.

Thus, to make a good impression, we might say that people should dress for success.

Spiritually, we might now ask: how do we dress for success with God? How do we hope to make a good impression or even secure His approval or acceptance? Those kind of questions are answered in our Old Testament lesson for today. This brings me to my sermon theme for today, “**God Dresses His People For Success.**” I’ll develop this theme in three parts:

- 1) A Robe Of Righteousness**
- 2) A Garment Of Salvation;** and,
- 3) Rejoice In Our New Clothes**

1) A Robe Of Righteousness. Probably the first thing we might ask when we read the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah, is: Who is speaking?

Well, the New Testament answers that question for us. Isaiah 61 begins:

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me,
Because the LORD has anointed Me

To bring good news to the afflicted;
He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to captives
And freedom to prisoners; (Isaiah 64,1)

In the fourth chapter of the Gospel According to Saint Luke, the evangelist records the words of Jesus when Jesus spoke in the synagogue in Nazareth and Jesus quoted the words written by Isaiah. Then Jesus said,

Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. (Luke 4,21)

The “Me” and “I” of Isaiah in chapter 61 speak about God’s Suffering Servant of several chapters previous. In other word, Isaiah is speaking of Jesus, Who will be born some 700 years after the days of Isaiah.

Now Jesus is speaking of how God is going to clothe Him – and we’ll see that how God clothes His Son has everything to do with how God will clothe us.

What is “righteousness”?

In regard to God, righteousness is nothing else than having a right standing with God, to be able to come into His presence.

Jesus could do that. He was born the sinless Son of God. In time, He took on our flesh. Here, God made Jesus Who knew no sin to become sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Did you catch the last few words? Paul says we can become

the righteousness of God only in Christ – “in Him.”

What about apart from Christ?

Well, when God called Isaiah into the ministry Isaiah was standing in the heavenly throne room. Isaiah bemoaned his fate and said,

Woe is me, for I am ruined!
Because I am a man of unclean lips,
And I live among a people of unclean lips;
For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Hosts. (Isaiah 6,5)

Elsewhere Isaiah speaks about all human striving to try to get right with God on our own efforts. Isaiah says:

For all of us have come like one who is unclean,
And all of our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment;
And all of us wither like a leaf,
And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. (Isaiah 64,6)

Apart from Christ, we are conceived in sin and in no way can please God – for we sin in thought, word, and deed, both by what we do and what we leave undone.

But Christ has wrapped us in the robe of His righteousness. This is the robe that has been woven for us on the warp of Christ’s perfect obedience to the divine Law which we have broken, and the woof of Jesus’ suffering and death to atone for our sins.

This robe covers us completely and is placed upon us when the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts in the atoning work of Christ on our behalf when we hear the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

Thus, we are clothed with

2) A Garment Of Salvation. Our salvation is based upon the righteousness of Christ.

When God looks upon a believer in Christ, what does God see? Or perhaps we should ask: what doesn't God see?

God does not see our naturally filthy garments — garments which are sin-stained and defile us before God.

In place of our sin-stained garments, God sees the righteousness of Christ.

Paul explicitly speaks about this in his Letters to the Galatians and the Ephesians.

To the Galatians Paul said:

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (Galatians 3,27)

And to the Ephesians, Paul said:

just as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, ²⁶ so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, ²⁷ that He might present to Himself the Church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. (Ephesians 5,25-27)

What a fantastic picture! God shows us what he sees when He looks at believers – His Church. All, without exception, are dressed

in clean, fresh, clothing, which make the wearer acceptable to God. But the clothing is always Christ's and He covers us with His righteousness.

Thus, when God brings us before Him, we do not come with our sin-stained scraps. We are not like Adam and Eve in the Garden parading our fig leaves in front of God and pretending that these are the height of fashion.

We have been robed and clothed by Jesus Himself. Before God, God has dressed for success in Christ. His robe of righteousness and garment of salvation are the clothes which make the person.

Thus, as believers, we can

3) Rejoice In Our New Clothes. Sometimes it is hard to get excited about clothes. As an adult, I know that there are times when I have to buy new clothes – the old ones have worn out, or for one reason or another, they no longer fit. In general, I think women get a bit more excited about shopping than men.

When we're children, it is really hard to get excited about clothes, unless it might be the latest fashion statement, such as a special pair of sneakers. But socks or underwear? Especially when those might be Christmas or birthday gifts. That would be unexcitement supreme.

But what does Jesus say about new clothes? He says:

I will rejoice greatly in the LORD,
My soul will exult in my God.

The new clothes of Christ are something to get excited about, something about which we can rejoice.

But what does it mean to rejoice in this robe of righteousness and garment of salvation?

First, it means that we have to realize that this is something we see only with the eyes of faith. It is not something that we touch or feel.

Second, we have to realize that it's cost is beyond our wildest imagination. As I said before, these clothes have been woven on the warp of Christ's perfect obedience to the divine Law which we have broken and the woof of Jesus' suffering and death to atone for our sins – and this is the means by which He purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy and precious blood and innocent suffering and death. We cannot get costlier clothing.

Third, since this clothing is given to us in our Baptism, it gives us eternal salvation. Not only are these costly clothes, they will never, ever wear out.

Fourth, following up on the significance of Baptism, we see that we are to daily remember our baptism so that we die to sin and rise to newness of life.

Thus, our new clothes daily call us to repentance and in the forgiveness Christ has won for us let us walk before God in righteousness and purity.

Our rejoicing is shown when we follow Jesus.

Our rejoicing is shown when we take up our Cross to serve others.

Our rejoicing is shown when we rest in the salvation Jesus has won for us, knowing that we have peace with God on account of Christ.

Conclusion: Do clothes make the man or the woman? Well, in front of other people, the answer is probably “yes.” But these are the kind of clothes one buys. These are the clothes which will inevitably wear out.

What about before God? Before God, if we try to come to Him on our own, then our clothing will be the equivalent of sin-stained fig leaves. Hardly adequate, and in fact, condemn us.

But God would clothe us in the robe of Jesus’ righteousness and the garment of salvation. In this, we stand before God as forgiven and rejoicing in our forgiveness. God has clothed us in Christ for success for living with Him and for Him, both now and forever. Amen.

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

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