

Text: Matthew 22:11-14 But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?" And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." For many are called, but few are chosen.

GOD'S DRESS CODE

When I was a little boy protesting wearing a tie to Sunday School and Church, my Mother said "God does not hear the prayers of boys who do not wear ties." While German mothers were not necessarily believed, they were obeyed. So, I learned at an early age that dress codes were a matter of divine concern.

I wondered what God's dress code might be like – just what kind of clothing might she want us to wear? Of course, St. Paul has the answer. And it is in his letter to the Philippians. The spiritual garment which pleases God is whatever is *true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent and worthy of praise*. Let us spend a few minutes looking at this marvelous garment.

True and honorable: The first elements of this garment are true and honorable. This seems simple enough, but there are at least three kinds of truth bound in this fabric. Relative truth is a culturally bound notion. Something is true in one culture, but says something else in another. In western culture when we walk into someone's house we stay standing until we are introduced and asked to be seated. In traditional Fijian culture, the guest immediately seats oneself, unless you are trying to intimidate your host with your superiority. Cultural relativism frequently gets a bad press in religious publications, but it shouldn't. It is simply a way of acknowledging the validity of differences and does not indicate belief in or the superiority of, a different culture. There is also scientific truth. This is a statement of fact determined by scientific methods. It is not eternal and may change over time as science uses new methods of exploration and explanation. Then there are spiritual truths. These truths are not the product of science, they are the product of belief. They do change over time, but they may change very slowly and elicit great defensiveness when challenged. In our own Church changing views of sexuality are a good example.

Paul links truth with being honorable. This is especially directed toward spiritual truths because Paul is reminding us that emerging truths must be imbedded in our basic values. The church's view of sexuality must be imbedded in the Jesus value of inclusiveness. It is Paul's reminder that honor is worthwhile as a Christian goal and that honor comes from our acknowledgement of living our values.

Our spiritual garment also has *just and pure* threads running through it. We all take actions based on mixed motives -- altruism mixes with ego-centric, selfish motives. But if our robe of spiritual action is to meet God's standards we must seek to do, and to be influenced by, those things that are just and pure. We are not Pharisees; Jesus went far beyond "an eye for an eye" view of justice. To be pure and just is to take the forgiveness of sin and extend that to all for a full reconciliation. Personally, this is a standard of behavior that I rarely meet. "Vengeance is mine" says the Lord, but all too often I prefer to get even in the here and now. Thank you, Jesus, for infinite forgiveness!

The threads of our garment grow in complexity as we add *pleasing and commendable* to the fabric's composition. Paul tells us that we are to think and act on those things that are pleasing and commendable. To know Jesus is to know joy and delight. That is due, in part, to the fact that we can see what is pleasing and commendable in other people. When we wear our spiritual garment, we see that Jesus has stripped the pre-suppositions and prejudices from our eyes so that we might see people as Jesus sees them: Whole, sinful and redeemed, but altogether pleasing and with qualities that are commendable. If we see things that are commendable, let us commend!

Finally, Paul reminds us that our garment must contain those threads that allow us to focus on what is *excellent and worthy of praise*. There is excellence all around us. Excellent work being done, excellent nature to be enjoyed, and, most of all, excellent people, going about their daily tasks with honor and devotion. All things, that certainly are worthy of praise. Yet, we allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the sheer volume of contemporary disaster. This is not to say that we should be blind to evil, but neither should we be so blinded to

good that we allow ourselves to wallow in despair. We see much that is worthy of praise – so let us praise!

There we have God's dress code. A proper wedding robe made of good threads that call for action. Now, if you are interested in a whole Christian wardrobe, you need to visit Paul's letter to the Colossians 3:12. . .There you will find that each garment meets God's dress code. But, that is for another time. Amen!