

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Our text this morning is from Isaiah, “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations.

For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. The nations

shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give.”

How many of you received some new article of clothing for Christmas? It is a pretty common gift, and it is supremely practical. Everyone needs to be clothed, after all. The importance of clothing is hard to underestimate. The clothes that we wear communicate something about ourselves and the way that we want the world to view us. If we see someone wearing a police uniform, we expect certain things from them. It is the same as if we see a soldier, a firefighter, or a doctor. Of course, this can also mean that when we see people dressed in other attire, it can leave us uneasy and mistrustful of the person. Like it or not, the clothes do, in many ways, make the man. I'm not saying it is good or right, but it is reality. We need clothes.

Thankfully, our God has given us some clothing. Our text this morning says, “he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.” Our gracious and loving Father has given us clothes to wear. Like the master in the parable that Jesus tells who invites people to the wedding feast, he expects his guests to be properly attired.

And when we are not properly attired, it can make for difficult or embarrassing situations. When I was on vicarage, Lindsay and I took a trip to Chicago. The first night we were there, we went for a walk down Navy Pier and decided to stop at a little seafood restaurant on the boardwalk. But instead of being allowed to eat outside like we wanted, we were ushered upstairs into the dining room. As soon as I turned to see the other patrons wearing suits, ties, and looking nice, I immediately knew we

were in the wrong restaurant. We were taken to our table by the gracious waitress who assured me that my Batman t-shirt and Lindsay's shirt from nursing school were not a problem. Indeed, no one bothered us, but we clearly didn't fit in.

In the same way, we can feel like we don't fit in among God's people. We may look around and see people who are apparently more righteous than we are or who have their lives together more than we do. We can feel out of place if we don't know as much as someone sitting next to us or if we find the liturgy difficult to follow for the first few times that we worship. We may experience that feeling of being an imposter and that any minute now, someone is going to discover and expose us for the frauds that we are.

But the truth is that we are all sinners. Yes, we all have the robes of righteousness and salvation, but those robes are covering some truly disgusting things underneath. Because on

our own, when left to our own devices, we would be very much like the little child that's dressed up for a special occasion and then goes out to play in the mud. We go out into the world and we wallow in the evil that surrounds us. We crawl around in the muck of sexual immorality. We are stained with cowardice when courage was needed. We fold up the front of our shirts in order to fill them with greed, envy, and malice. We wrestle with others in the garbage over ridiculous things that mean nothing in the larger scope of our lives, but the need to win is so overpowering that we will get dirty just to win.

And at the end of the day, we look in the mirror and we can hardly find a single clean spot on our garments. We are head to toe black with evil and sin. And then we look around hoping that no one has noticed. But it doesn't matter if someone else has noticed or not. What matters is that we all know our own deeds.

We all see that we go out into the muck again and again and

again. We even continue to go out into it as it becomes harder and harder to come back out of. There are also those who simply become so fascinated with the things to be found in the muck that they stay there. It is easier to just stay there if you know you're coming back tomorrow, right?

One of things that is truly irritating as a parent is when you give your child something that they need, something that's nice, and they immediately mess it up. Maybe some of you have already experienced that with Christmas being so recent. You buy them a nice new coat and they leave it at the bus stop. You get them nice new jeans and they come home with paint on them. The expensive name brand tennis shoes have holes in the toes in no time. How much more do you think our God is frustrated and angered by our own careless decisions and actions that mar these garments of righteousness that he has given to us? We would never think of taking a Christmas gift that we are

given and destroying it right in front of the person who gave it to us. But yet we will daily reject God and work to destroy that which he has redeemed. Truly, none of us are actually worthy to wear this robe of righteousness. We are all imposters, people who should have no place amongst the truly righteous of God's people.

But the truth of the Gospel is that our God, rather than turning away from us and leaving us to sink further into the cesspool that we have created for ourselves by our own sin, sent his only begotten son to win salvation for us. He sent his son to come and rescue us from the pit of despair that we inevitably would find ourselves in without him. He sent Jesus to be your savior and mine.

It is Christ our savior who has taken our robes and made them white again. But he didn't do it through special laundry techniques. He didn't know any special life hacks to remove

stains. He makes them, and us, white with his own blood. His blood that was shed at the cross is the detergent that cleanses us. His blood, which should rightly stain us far more than any other sin, instead makes us clean. All of us who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb have a place at his feast. We are made to be worthy through him. We have been clothed by him with a robe of righteousness that he won, but has given to us.

We who understand and recognize his presence in his supper are admitted to his table. Even though we know ourselves to be wretched sinners, in his eyes, we are his perfect friends. We are made to be sons of God through faith in Christ and so we gather together for this foretaste of the wedding feast to come. We have been given a robe of righteousness that is more splendid than what we can imagine. It is better than the finest of clothes that one would wear on their wedding day. God

has adorned us in the pure righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ who shed his blood for us.

His blood that was shed for us at the cross is the very nourishing rain that falls upon the garden of God's Kingdom, causing it to sprout up. And this garden has spread to cover the whole earth. The righteousness of God continues to pop up in new places within new people. His praises are sung in almost every language on earth. All of this happens because of what Christ has done for us at the cross. His blood gives life to the lifeless and cleanliness to the soiled.

And because we have received this wonderful gift, this garment of righteousness and salvation, we can do nothing other than talk about it. Just as we are quick to tell someone about a new jacket or shirt that we love, how much more should we be eager to talk about the salvation that is ours in Christ?! The praises of God cannot be stopped from our lips. Our thanks and

praise of our God come as a natural outflowing of the grace that we have received from him. We tell people about our Lord as we have opportunity.

We don't cram him down people's throats, but I pray that God would give us all the courage necessary to speak the truth about our God and about our faith when we are asked. We may not all have a gift for flowery language, or even think of ourselves as the most qualified or articulate of Christ's disciples, but we are his disciples nonetheless and we ought not let our cowardice soil the clean garments of righteousness.

And this happens when we rightly understand the reason that we are not to keep silent. We aren't talking about God because it makes us look good. We should not use our God to get ahead or to gain favor with people. Rather, we speak for the sake of those who have not yet heard. And we speak for those who are his people and who need the support of a brother or

sister in Christ. We speak not for ourselves, but for our neighbor.

We do all of this because we have been made part of Christ's kingdom. We are his people, claimed by him by his own blood. We have been given a name that identifies us to the world. We are called Christians by the world, but our God simply calls us his children. Thanks be to God for his mercy to continue to care for us and love us in spite of our own sin. May he lead us in paths that are in keeping with the righteousness that he has given us and continues to call us to walk in. Amen.

Now, may the peace that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord to life everlasting. Amen.