

Mike Weaver for 11th October 2020

Back in the 1970's I joined Greater Manchester Fire Service, and for the first time as an adult I started wearing uniform. It felt quite strange as my clothes were now telling everybody that saw me who I was, what I did, and what I stood for. I found that people now had expectations just from seeing me arrive. It was even more so when I was wearing my "fire gear". In every situation I was expected to know exactly what to do, and not only "know" what to do but to actually do it. The reality of course was that there were times when my mind was racing trying to find the best solution for the disasters that were happening to those looking to me. I didn't have the answers for every single situation but because everybody was looking at me; I had to appear at least outwardly calm and competent. I just had to do my very best. Just imagine if I'd got off the fire engine and refused to help or just shrugged my shoulders and said "Oh I can't do anything". I'm saying that wearing the uniform dictated both my actions and my speech, and in wearing the uniform I had to fulfil the expectations of that uniform or bring disgrace to the Fire Service.

And it's not just uniform. In the words of my Dad whenever I followed fashion rather than wear a suit and tie:

"Clothes maketh the Man". (or woman).

I'm sure he pinched that off Shakespeare, or perhaps he'd heard Mark Twain's updated version.

But it is so true. Nowadays when I interview people for jobs and I see them for the first time it sticks out like a sore thumb when candidates turn up in a tee shirt and trainers rather than dress smartly. I don't even object to jeans when they can cost twice as much as a suit; but appearance shows something about the person and suggests what they are about.

You're probably wondering where I'm going with this. But what I'm heading for is that we are asked to clothe ourselves in Christ and people expect anybody clothed in Christ to follow Christian values not just on a Sunday but every day and every minute.

In the Bible there are many, many references to being clothed in Christ. It was one of Paul's favourite things. In both Ephesians and Galatians he refers to having "put on Christ".

Again in Ephesians he says,

"Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand."

In our parable today we are looking at events that probably could never happen really. Let's face it who turns down the opportunity for a slap-up dinner given by the King? Well nobody in their right mind. And yet they do. I'm not going to go into the metaphor of the wedding banquet and the Kingdom of Heaven as I'll save that for another day. Not once do they refuse, but twice, and they even go so far as to abuse those delivering the invitations! It may seem like an overreaction by the King to declare war, but in those times to refuse an invitation such as this would have been considered a declaration of war anyway. So perhaps the King's reaction is quite understandable. But he is determined to give his son a wedding feast, with guests, to remember so he invites anybody that the servants can find hanging around on street corners, "the bad and the good" and the wedding banquet

goes ahead. I love the way that in this one sentence Jesus is inviting everybody to “The Banquet” and giving the opportunity to make good.

So the guests were all wearing their wedding clothes. In those days a wedding robe was a very grand garment with jewels sewn into it, or if you couldn't afford expensive clothes you would try and wear white, or just freshly wash the best clothes you had. Yes all the guests made the effort except for one.

This man just turned up, as requested, but made no effort to dress respectfully, or to be part of the festivities. In short he was just along for the ride. He was a gatecrasher. Just along for the free food and drink and his appearance could be seen as disdainful. So the King was quite right to throw him out. He was thrown to a place where there would be gnashing of teeth. (I can't remember where I saw it, perhaps a Dave Allen sketch, where a priest was threatening this “gnashing of teeth” when an old man said that he didn't have any teeth, and the priest replies “.. Teeth will be provided”. Sorry I just can't help laughing at that line”). But back to the sermon.

So, I think that is what this passage is saying to us today. As Paul says, “Clothe yourself in Christ” and give witness to his love and his teachings. And having clothed ourselves in Christ we should wear it like a uniform. Life is very different at the moment but the values and teachings of Christ are constant. We all wear the uniform of Christ in some way. For some it is more obvious such as Ruth's clerical collar as well as her constant ministry. For others it's in actions. Keeping in touch with the lonely, putting food into the food bank, supporting cancer research and wearing their emblem. We all clothe ourselves in Christ in different ways. And we are seen to do so by those around us. They expect compassion, humility, love and understanding from those clothed in Christ. It is a uniform and we bear witness to Christ when we honour that uniform in our dealings with others.

And who knows? Nearly all the children I met, when I was in uniform, said that they wanted to be a fireman when they grew up. When people see the joy we find in being clothed in Christ they may look again at joining in with the wedding banquet.