

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Dressed, Named, Worn

Did you unwrap all your presents? Did you get what you wanted? What was your favorite present? Did you get the one from the LORD? Yes, you did. In fact, I can see you're wearing it today. It looks good on you. It definitely looks better than what you had on before. He must be planning something big, to want you to wear something so fantastic. Isaiah writes, "*I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*"

The LORD has dressed you for a banquet, a wedding feast. Thank God, too, because we were filthy. We were covered with the stains of sin, and those stains don't normally come out. We'd worn holes in our clothes from getting caught on ingratitude and selfishness. The messy entanglements of lust and greed were stuck in them like burrs. The once-shiny patches of self-righteousness had faded and become almost embarrassing after years of falling short of the law's standards. The pockets were ripped from shoving too much guilt in them, and despair was spreading like mold. There wasn't even enough fabric left to cover our all our shame, so we had to do our best just to cover our most despicable parts. Man, were we ever a mess. We were definitely not dressed for a banquet, barely even for a gutter. Then along came a kind benefactor. At His own expense, He dressed us for this important occasion, to which He Himself invited us. He gave us a robe made of the finest material, the material He Himself wears: righteousness. All this He did simply because He wanted to, not because His grandeur somehow hinged on our attendance.

Are you remembering any of this? I know some of you have been trying to remember precisely when and where it happened as you filled out your member information forms. You were born, as we heard in Friday's sermon, of perishable seed, and were rotting from your very beginnings. You were clothed with skin that would wrinkle with age, eyes that would darken, hands that would tremble, and minds that would slowly fade. In short, you were clothed in sin. Yet this kind Benefactor picked you up, using the hands of a parent or sponsor as His own, took off your rags, washed away your filth, and dressed you. He took your soiled and tattered scrubs of sin and gave you a seamless robe of perfect righteousness, a robe He had purchased with the costliest currency there is: His very own Body and Blood.

Isaiah writes, "*You will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.*" In good biblical fashion, Christ not only dressed you, but also gave you a name, because you are not only a guest, but also the bride; and a bride takes her bridegroom's name. What is this new name? It is His name: Christian.

When Tricia and I reached the age when all our friends were getting married, it wasn't uncommon to see some of her friends practicing their names-to-be. They would write them repeatedly. They would say them aloud, delighting in the sound, how it rang with love. These new names were prized possessions, whether or not they were names most would treasure; and, in fact, I can assure you, some of them were names I wouldn't wish on an enemy. So also, the Christian rejoices in his or her new name. We are Christians. We have a Christ, a Messiah and Savior. We are Christians, and the name fits because we depend on

and boast in Christ's righteousness, Christ's salvation, and Christ's redemption, and not our own.

And this is about where the sermon would have started to wrap up if there had not been a knock on my door yesterday, but there was a knock, and those of you in the Gospel according to St. John class know what that means. Tricia came to get me while I was shaving because there were two Jehovah's Witnesses at the door eager to blaspheme my Lord. Who can stand to hear someone say with a smile that our Lord Jesus is not God? Who can listen to someone add so many conditions to the gospel without grieving over the absolute uncertainty such a message brings? But, alas, we sinful wretches are determined to bring our rags to the banquet, aren't we?

Fellow beggars, stinking with the rancid stench of sin, you are not saved because you come to church, or because you've avoided certain sins, or because you tithe, or because you belong to a certain synod, or because you believe, or because of anything else you have done. Contrary to popular spelling, there is no "I" in salvation. I can do nothing to be saved. I am saved solely because Christ, my bridegroom, pulled me out of the gutter of sin, washed away my filth in Baptism, invited and brought me to the feast by the Word, and fed me in the Sacrament. You have a Jesus who's done it all or you have no Jesus at all. Leave your rags at home. God is not impressed with them.

Your faith is not your own good work; Christ caused you to believe, creating and preserving faith in your heart through the gospel. In Him, and for His sake, you are God's own bride. Apart from Him, you are just another pathetic schmuck who refused to come to the feast, who preferred the stink of sin to the sweet aroma of forgiveness. Isaiah is clear: "*The Lord God will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.*" The Lord brings righteousness. The Lord is the cause of our new status—the Lord, not us or anyone else. There is no *if*, no *have to*, no *cooperation* in the matter. There is only grace.

This grace has dressed us. This grace has named us. And, now, by God's grace, Isaiah says, the Lord actually wears us. "*You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.*" The Lord now wears His bride, the Church, you and I, as His greatest possession and most glorious ornament. He wears His precious sinners as trophies, showing all false saints what a real saint is: the product of His grace. Think about that. The Lord wants to show you off at His feast. You are His main attraction. You are His crown and diadem. You are a miracle of His mercy.

Did you open your presents? Sure you did. I don't know what your favorite was when you came through these doors, but I sure hope your choice is clear now: the Lord's robe and the Lord's name. When the prophets foresaw things, they oftentimes saw several events as one unified and awesome act of God. Such is the case today. The prophet's words found fulfillment at Christmas and will be fulfilled at Christ's Second Coming. As a bridge between these too grand salvific feats, our Lord has left us His Holy Supper. Everything is ready. In fact, St. Paul says it has been planned since before the creation of the world. We are dressed. We are named. Come to His banquet now, and receive your Bridegroom with the joy of a bride who has waited her entire life for this day. Then go as His crown, declaring His *righteousness and praise to all the nations*. Amen.