

# *Ascension Lutheran Church*

*Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of December 28, 2008*

## Christ is Our Spiritual Dress (Isaiah 61:10-62:3)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text is from the 61<sup>st</sup> and 62<sup>nd</sup> chapters of 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."

This is the text.

Dear friends in Christ, Yes, they're still here – the manger scene, the advent candles, the decorations and the Christmas tree. For the past several weeks now our homes, our places of work, our church; yes, even we ourselves have been decked out in Christmas apparel. At this time of year some of us like to wear our special Christmas sweater or Christmas tie or socks. We wear these special clothes and put up these special decorations because they fit the occasion.

Sometimes we say things like "I haven't got a thing to wear". It's not that we've any real lack of clothes. In fact, in most of our closets there would likely be enough clothes for ten or more people or more in most places in the world. It isn't that we haven't a got thing to wear, really. The trouble is we feel that what we do have is somehow sub-par, unfit or inadequate for the occasion.

That is probably not the case with you in a fashion sense. Many of us have very nice clothes. But in another sense you may have reason to wonder about what you've worn to church today. And I'm not talking about our clothes. I'm talking about your spiritual condition before God. And from God's Word we hear that it would be very accurate for us to say that before Him, we haven't got a thing to wear. If it were not for Christ we would be spiritually naked and soiled with sin before God.

In fact, when Adam and Eve first brought sin into the world in the Garden of Eden they felt naked too. When they heard God walking in the cool of the day they were afraid. They felt the sentence of death and they tried to hide. They made clothes for themselves out of fig leaves to try to hide their shame. This feeling of guilt and shame has continued on down through history. Hebrews 4 says that the Word of God is "sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." God is present everywhere and He knows all things. He knows your inmost thoughts. Nothing is hidden before Him. We're exposed before the eyes of God and what He sees is not pretty.

It is pictured in the prophetic vision of Zechariah 3. There the high priest, Joshua, is dressed in filthy rags. It's meant as a picture, not just of his sins before God, but of all

the sins of all God's people that Joshua represents. It is a picture of all humanity as we stand before the Almighty. It's an image that reminds us all that when it comes to our God we really haven't a thing to wear, nothing suitable anyway. No, as Isaiah reminds us just a few chapters later, "even our righteous deeds, the best of our works, the most prestigious accomplishments we've attained in this world; are like filthy rags before God." The best of our deeds, the greatest that this world and our lives have to offer is still unable to adequately dress us up and make us presentable before God.

Friends, not just anything will do. We live in a consumerist society and we know this from shopping. In these post-Christmas days shops are full of people not entirely satisfied with what they received. The style didn't suit them. The quality didn't measure up. The size wasn't quite right. Some items are merely exchanged for a size a bit smaller or tad bigger. For some the entire purchase was scrapped. Money was refunded and used for something else. Outfits were matched and re-matched until the look was right for them, until they felt comfortable with what they had.

It's a good shopping strategy, I suppose, when it comes to clothes - just run to the mall and get what you want, what you think you need, what you feel you can't live without. However, you can be sure that this strategy does not work when it comes to your standing before God. If we could mould God into whomever we wanted Him to be than this strategy will sound just fine. However, this is a vain endeavour. There is only one true God and we cannot mix and match parts of the Bible we like or aspects of God we like and mould Him into something that suits our tastes, that suits our current lifestyle.

Jesus dealt with religious shoppers in His day too. Who can forget the Parable of the Wedding Banquet in Matthew 22? As Jesus tells the story, the King looks out at all of his guests and notices a single man who was there, but dressed unlike any of the others who had come. He was missing wedding clothes. He had clothes, but not the appropriate clothes. "Friend," He asked, "how did you get in here without wedding clothes." The man was speechless. And then receiving no answer the king said to his servants, "Bind him hand and foot and cast him outside. Into the darkness with him where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Parables are word pictures of the kingdom of God. And the picture is clear. Not every religious garb that we're offered is sufficient. No robe that we have fashioned ourselves can ever hope to cover our every spot and stain. This is why repentance and a contrite heart is crucial if you are to enter the heavenly kingdom.

Friends, there is one robe that does cover our spots and blemishes, that covers our sins. This robe is sufficient in every way and it does not come from you. You cannot buy it or make it. This robe comes from the Lord Himself. It is woven in His love, with His own blood, sweat and tears.

That's what's described in our text today, a robe that the Lord is offering. It's a robe unblemished with sin. It is a robe that gives Christ's perfect life that was lived in our place. It is the right clothes and the right fit too. It's a robe that's been made to cover the filth of a world's sin and shame. When God is your tailor you get a perfect garment

along with a special headband that says – “child of God.” This is your Baptism when you were washed and made a child of God.

Jesus was born so He could live the perfect life as your substitute. God became flesh in order to reconcile you to Him and give you a relationship with Him so He is not far away and unconcerned. He is your dear Heavenly Father.

Friends, since we have such a wonderful gift and glorious dress from our Father He leads us to reflect Him in this world all by the grace He provides. So don't be shy about showing it off. At the beginning of Isaiah 61 the Lord about Christ says, “He has sent me to “provide for those who grieve in Zion- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes,” to make of them “a garment of praise instead of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendour.” My friends, in God's sight for the sake of Christ you are a crown of beauty and a garment of praise. As His Church we are called oaks of righteousness and we are intended to be reflecting Him.

God's purpose in Christ is fulfilled, not just in our redemption through faith in Jesus and His cross; but in our being and living as God's redeemed in this life. It's fulfilled in full when Christ's life lives in us, when His love shows through us for all to see. Faith is not merely a private thing between you and God. It is lived out in our lives in the grace He provides. We get dressed in Christ, we Him on everyday long after the Christmas season has ended and the decorations have been put away.

In a little while our Christmas decorations will come down. Our Christmas sweaters and ties and other clothes will be stored for another year. But the real clothes of Christmas need not be put away. They are to be put on display. Our witness to Christ is part of who we are. As Christ our Lord says, “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven”. My prayer is that we would continue to let Jesus Christ be our tailor, the one who daily mends our tears and patches our souls in the hearing of His Word and the receiving of His sacrament; the one who gives us to demonstrate His life-giving love to others until His return. Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.