

Naked No More

Luke 8:26-39;

Galatians 3:23-29

Slide: Wedding

It's wedding season. And, in this world where COVID-19 is now the new normal and how to deal with it, the weddings are happening again with great joy and intention. I just officiated for a wedding that was a small gathering of people, but very traditional. But then on the other hand, I was also invited to and attended a wedding a couple weeks ago at the Brewing Projekt here in Eau Claire and the couple had 16 attendants! It was very unique. What was also unique was that the air show was going on at the same time, right during the vows. The couple laughed and waited. Nothing would stop their joy that day.

With all the weddings I have attended or officiated, whether they are church weddings, outdoor venues, hotels or barns, one thing I have always seen is

consistent – the couple's attention to their clothing. What will they wear? Will it be a dress or tux that will show the uniqueness of the person? Will the colors express who they are?

And, the attention to that dressing for the wedding, often setting aside hours to make sure it's just right for that very special day...well they're generally aren't very many events like it in our lives. Even the few couples that I have officiated for who met at Carson Park or at a hiking trail, dressed as if they were going camping, but they dressed with intention just as much. They wanted their clothing to reflect who they were at that very moment.

Slide: Baptism

Clothing and how we are clothed – this imagery is stitched throughout the readings for today. They may escape our notice, but when read again and again, we might ask, why is it important that both of these readings use this language

of being clothed? Why does the Apostle Paul talk about being clothed in Christ in this reading from Galatians? Did you notice that statement in the Galatians reading? He says the following: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

And, this isn't the only place in his letters where he says this. He says it again in 2nd Corinthians chapter 5 where he speaks of having heavenly clothing; and again in Colossians chapter 3, we are instructed to be clothed in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

And, in the Gospel reading for today, it should not escape our notice that the man who is healed from a vast number of demons is found by the town after the healing to be clothed and in his right mind. Who gave him the clothing? Did Jesus give it to him? The image of clothing is significant here, it has intentionality, so what

does it mean when we hear this symbolism in the Bible?

The early church when hearing these words about clothing oneself or putting on Christ would immediately know that both Luke and Paul likely referring to Holy Baptism. Early on in the life of the church, those who prepared for baptism went into the water naked, were baptized in the name of the Triune God, renounced the forces of evil and then had a white robe placed upon them as they came out of the water.

The white robe symbolized taking off the power of sin and evil in the world and putting on Christ. To this day, the remnant can be seen in the wearing of white robes or albs by pastors, deacons, acolytes and assistants during worship. The white robe is also recommended to be worn by the newly baptized as they are brought to the font. So, you see, there is a method to this madness of wearing white even on a hot day. It is a very important

symbol of the garment we all put on in Christ.

Putting on Christ is something that we as believers and followers of Jesus acknowledge at Holy Baptism. When anyone is baptized, they “put on Christ and his salvation”. This isn’t just a nice symbolic idea. Baptism isn’t simply a naming ritual, or an initiation into something. It isn’t only the start of as calling from God into our lives of faith.

Of course, it is all those things, but more importantly, it is also putting on the power and promise of Christ to work on our very own symbolic “demons” and with Christ, to make us whole when we are broken, to root out the death dealing ways in which we live. Now, when I say demons, I mean the many ways we suffer throughout our lives either imposed upon us or imposed by us. These are ways that often separate us from Christ and from each other.

For each of us, like it was for the man who suffered from a legion of demons, we all struggle with our own problem of sin and our own sufferings. Look at the world around us. 49 million people are food insecure because of Russia’s war, because of the scorching heat of climate change, and because of supply line interruption during this pandemic. And, that’s just in other countries. Here, we have similar problems but we also have complexities of a political nature, where people demonize the other, where we cannot have conversations even about race without intense polarization; where many may suffer a pandemic economy.

Add to this our own personal demons that of addiction, health concerns, family dysfunction, and whatever paralyzed state of hopelessness we enter into because of it. We need to know that we have something, SOMEONE more powerful than any of those

powers in our world, for indeed, they are a legion, they are many, and they strip us naked and make us believe that we cannot overcome them. That is a lie. The arc of God's justice always bends towards the liberation and sanctity of all even when it seems hidden from us.

I think this is important for us to say in today's world, right now, and out of this Gospel story from today. Just look at how unwelcome Jesus was when he came to visit this town, when after healing this man, the town was afraid. They had grown used to the status quo of this man's demons and his chains. They had sent him to the tombs where they could not see his suffering. Perhaps they didn't want to see it. It was easier not to.

And, when this man suddenly was clothed and in his right mind again, did they rejoice? No. Their instinct was quite the opposite, to send Jesus away, to be afraid. They

were not at first glad to see the necessary and positive change in this man, in their town and even in their own views. They were used to him being naked. Certainly they thought that could never change.

When we celebrate Holy Baptism, when we confess our sins, when we celebrate the loved one at the funeral, we acknowledge that through this Holy Sacrament, we die with Christ to our sin and to our ways that keep us there. We also rise with Christ through Holy Baptism as he was raised from the dead, newly clothed and in a right mind. Each day, we are given that new chance to die and rise, each new day a gift through these waters: on difficult days, on good days, on joyous days, on sorrowful days – each day, we are clothed in the garment known as Christ. Did you know that this is completely contrary to the world and the world's ways? It's an exorcism!

Slide: Kids at the Font

Therefore, anyone who observes a baptism any day in this beautiful place of worship or in any place of worship, perhaps we first acknowledge that this is Christ casting out sin, drowning it. It is not a soft image. It is not a cute image. It is more than symbol. It is more than water. Holy Baptism itself casts out evil and the powers of this world that long to tame us and attempt to convince us that we have no worth. Stripped naked, made bare by the evil that claims to be good around us, we are instead clothed new in Jesus Christ through these waters, which renew us each time we come to those promises.

The Gospel reading for today gives us a glimpse of the power of God to expel and cast out darkness, despair, and even the idea that nothing can change for good. Today, what are your demons that need drowning in this water? What are the ways Christ longs to heal you and clothe you in? The promises are there for you.

Today. Tomorrow. Always.
You...are naked no more.

Amen.