

I've Got You Covered

12/13/20

St John Nottingham

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

God's Word comes to us this morning from our Old Testament reading where we hear these words once more: "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." (Isaiah 61:10) This is the Word of the Lord.

Clothes are important, wouldn't you agree? The fashion industry would go so far as to say that "Clothes make the person". And to a great extent we believe it. "You are what you wear." I dress therefore I am.

We can "dress for success" or we can dress for failure. Show up for a job interview in shorts and a t-shirt and you will likely fail to get a job. What we wear tells others something about ourselves. We use clothing to make a statement... to attract attention... to express loyalty and to show solidarity. Uniforms tell others what we do. Jerseys indicate who is on your team. At the College Bowl games, you can tell where each of the two different schools' fans is just by looking at the colors in the stadium.

Special occasions require special clothing. Black-tie dinners. Formal dances. Think about all the fuss that's made over clothing at weddings. The groom's tuxedo. The bridesmaid's dresses. The bride and her wedding gown. More time and energy and money and attention are lavished on that dress... than just about anything else at the wedding. There probably isn't one piece of clothing that is more admired... than a wedding dress... worn for only a few hours... and then packed away... almost never to be seen or worn again.

In our Old Testament reading the prophet Isaiah is literally singing and shouting for joy over his clothing. He is singing in the voice of Christ, and in the voice of a believer. "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God.." And Isaiah's cause for rejoicing... is his clothing. "for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation; He has covered me with the robe of righteousness." Almighty God... Creator of heaven and earth and of all things... has clothed Isaiah... with salvation and righteousness. He is decked out like a bride and groom on their wedding day. And that is cause... for rejoicing and singing.

God has been in the clothing business since He first clothed Adam and Eve in the garden. After they grabbed for knowledge apart from God they became self-aware and then realized they were naked. They experience shame. They attempted to cover themselves with fig leaves stitched together. After flushing them out of hiding and confronting them with their sin... God covered them with animal skins. But the skins came at a cost – blood sacrifice. Clothing can be a bloody business, which was precisely God’s point. Covering for sin... requires blood sacrifice. And there is nothing pretty - or cheap - about it.

And so the clothing that God provides is costly.. Costly in terms of the holy, precious blood of His Son. The robe of righteousness that Isaiah sings over was purchased at Calvary... by the One who wore rags at His birth... hung naked on a cross... while soldiers threw dice for his robe. Christ endured the shame of our sin.. in order to cover us with His righteousness.

“I’ve got you covered”.... In other words “you’re protected.” That’s what God is saying. “I’ve... got you... covered.” Don’t be ashamed. Don’t hide. Hold your head up high. You are covered with Christ. You are well dressed in the sight of the Lord. “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ”... or have been clothed with Christ. (Gal 3:27).

That’s better than the most exquisite designer fashion you could possibly wear. You wear Christ. Not at all stylish by this world’s standards of fashion... but absolutely perfect... by God’s standards... of the Law. His garment of salvation... His seamless robe of righteousness... Purchased with His precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death. And that sure beats anything that we could stitch together for ourselves.

Self-made clothing may be economical... practical... even somewhat satisfying to make. But this do-it-yourself approach won’t work to clothe us before God. Sure, we may try to cover ourselves with our own self-chosen works, our piety, our holiness, our charity, our religion, our commandment-keeping. We may even be able to stitch together a few acts of kindness... sew on some heartfelt devotion... maybe even tack on some pious prayer and praise. But as a covering for our sin before God.... anything we do... amounts to nothing more than rags or fig leaves... compared with the clothing God provides.

God clothing us is His gift. We are born as children of God, not by our choice or decision... but by the will of God. Conceived by the Spirit and born... in Baptism. He made us His children in His Son Jesus Christ. In Ephesians St. Paul says that we were chosen “in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.” God was stitching together our salvation long before we were around for the fitting.

Some of you may receive new clothing for Christmas. There's nothing better than clothing that brings out your best... and hides your worst. You want to go out and be seen. You want to show it off a bit. "Look what I got." In a sense... we will all celebrate the gift of a new set of clothing at Christmas. Not a new shirt or dress... but Jesus Christ... who came to be clothed with our sin so that we might be clothed with His righteousness. That little baby-God in the manger... is our holiness before God.

In Holy Baptism, we are clothed in Christ, Who exchanged His robe of righteousness for our sins... and we now stand in His perfect righteousness. God covers your worst... with His best. You look good, beloved... wearing Christ. You can approach your Father in heaven with boldness and with confidence wearing that kind of Christmas clothing.

And you will want to boast about the One who gave it to you. "Look what He gave me." Isaiah says in the next chapter, "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."

What good is new clothing... if no one sees it? It is meant to be seen... with you in it. God sent His Son to save us! Who can keep quiet? God has covered us with His perfect holiness! Who can keep silent? The baby in the manger has conquered our sin and death! God's Son died and rose for us! Who can help but praise Him?

God has given you His Son. He is your Sunday best. Too often people think, "I have to clean up my act before I come to the church." If one waits for that... they'll never come. The church is where God cleans up your act for you. He washes and dresses you for the occasion. The baptismal font holds a special place in the sanctuary for everyone to see...for it stands as a reminder that you come into God's presence through the death and resurrection of Jesus.... through Baptism. That's where our Lord washes you and clothes you with your Sunday best... so that you appear before Him... spotless... glorious... radiant... like a bride and groom on their wedding day.

"But, I don't deserve it. My life's a mess." You know what, brothers and sisters... Christ died for your mess. So confess your sin... acknowledge that you - like the whole lot of us - are a poor, miserable sinner... and receive Christ's forgiveness. And don't think for a moment that your sin is so great... that Christ can't cover it... in an instant. That... is the pride of unbelief. Some will say, "It's bad for my self-esteem to call myself a sinner." You bet it is! It is death to your self-esteem. The only way that you can esteem yourself... is to die to yourself... and have Christ give you a new self that you can esteem.

Before we can be clothed with Christ... we need to be unclothed of our self-importance, our self-righteousness, our pride... our arrogance. That's the part we don't like. That's what we don't want. That's why we become irritated with God's Word... and with those who preach it. That's why we flock after the philosophies of the world that preach self-esteem... self-esteem where there is no self TO esteem. We'd just as soon stand in front of the mirror of the Law in our silly, stitched-together fig leaves, and say... "Looks pretty good to me, don't you think?"

And God - the master tailor - the clothier of the naked, says, "You look foolish! You look foolish in fig leaves. They're not you. Let me give you something better to wear!" And He gives us Christ's perfect obedience... His suffering and death... His resurrection... and His glory. He slips on Christ's seamless robe of righteousness. And, oh my.... it fits perfectly... like no other piece of clothing. And God says, "See... what did I tell you . You look like a million bucks. You... look like my Son, whom I love."

Wow! Who can keep quiet about such gifts? Isaiah says, "I'm going to preach and sing about this until Zion shines like the morning sun, until Jerusalem blazes like a torch." And we are going to preach and sing it until the Church is aglow in the brightness of the One who is light and life. Nations and kings.. family and friends... neighbors... will look at your beautiful clothing, and say, "Where did you get that?" And you can tell them, and show them... and bring them to church. "Come and see. Come and be baptized, forgiven, cleansed and clothed." You too can put on your Sunday best.

And so much more than new clothing... you also get a new name... a name from God's own mouth. And new clothing and a new name mean a new... identity. That's good news on this third Sunday in Advent when our hope and anticipation are still running high. And with the New Year just around the corner... wouldn't it be great to just start over with a clean slate... a fresh start? No matter how stained and soiled yesterday was...you are fresh and clean in Christ. You wear His clothing. You bear His name.

God is pleased and proud to call you His beloved child. You are a crown of splendor in His hand, a royal crown. You are a sign to the world of God's kingship... His gracious reign. He holds you up as an example to the world of how He blesses... even through suffering, hardship, difficulty, loss... through COVID... through division... through a nation in unrest.

"For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace"... John writes. How true that is! Our Christmas stocking overflows with gift after gift::: Forgiveness of our sins. Eternal life with God. Salvation from death. Clothed in Baptism. The word of forgiveness. The body and blood of God's Son. Holy church. Holy ministry. A robe of righteousness. A new name. An identity as God's beloved child.

Beloved... delight greatly in the Lord, your God... He's got you covered... for He delights greatly... in you. This is the Word of the Lord. Amen.