

15 October 2017
Pentecost 19

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Washed, Dressed, and Worthy”

Text: Matthew 22:1-14 (Isaiah 25:6-9; Philippians 4:4-13;
and Introit: Isaiah 61:10)

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

His name was Jacob. He was proud of his name. He was named after the venerable Patriarch, the son of Isaac, the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. That was special to him, though he was no one special. He was, in fact, about the farthest thing from special. He was a lowly laborer, born to poor parents who were laborers. He didn't have much, but he was content. He considered himself fortunate to have gotten the job he did - a stone mason. Actually, that was just a fancy name for a rock cutter. But it was good work and enabled him to earn a living, however poor and meager it may have been. There were plenty of folks worse off than him, he reminded himself.

But one day, he noticed, things were different. He was working not too far from the king's house when he noticed activity had increased. In fact, the place was abuzz. Servants coming and going, decorations and special buildings were being put up, orders being barked out. He wondered what the special event was. A visiting dignitary, perhaps? The king's birthday? Whatever it was, he wasn't looking forward to that day - it would be a hassle. Lots of extra security, guards, questions - his work and daily life would be disrupted. Ach! Maybe he would just stay home that day.

Well, the preparations went on for sometime and his curiosity got the best of him. When one of the king's servants passed by where he was working, he called out and asked him what was happening? What was the special event? A wedding! was the reply. The king's son! Ah, now it made sense. The king only had one son, whom he loved very much. This was going to be the wedding feast to end all weddings feasts! How lucky would be those who were invited.

And then they day came. The castle looked incredible - better than it ever had before. The magnificence of it all was breathtaking. Jacob had thought about staying home to avoid all the hubbub that day, but the bill collector had just recently stopped by - he needed the money. And he was now kind of glad he was there. This was a sight to behold!

But . . . it was strange . . . where were all the guests? Where were the crowds? The servants returned as usual, but the guests weren't with them. That was weird. Then he

saw more servants go and come back alone as well. What were they saying? He strained hard to overhear . . . *Idiots! Don't they know the king has spared no expense? This is no day for them to stay home and work, shoveling manure on their farm and balancing the books. Idiots!*

And then, what was this? More servants returned, not mumbling but groaning! They had been beaten, and they were even carrying one who had been killed! Jacob dropped a stone on his foot when he saw that. He never dropped a stone! This day was not making any sense . . .

But then something did make sense - he saw royal troops leave the king's compound in a hurry. They were out for bear. You could tell it by the looks on their faces and the weapons in their hands. Revenge, no doubt, for what the people had done to the king's servants. Why hadn't they come? Why were they so spiteful? A free ***feast of rich food, well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined***. Why would you turn that down? Couldn't the farm work wait? Couldn't you balance the books tomorrow? He pitied those people doubly.

But before the troops could return, he heard more servants leave the king's house. What would happen next? What would he see this time? He wished he could leave. It was getting late in the day and he was tired and just wanted to go home. But they didn't go the way they did before - in fact, they were walking toward . . . *him!* But they weren't mad, like the troops - they looked . . . *joyful*. They came over to him, Jacob, and said . . . what? The king wanted . . . what? Who? Me? No! Yes? Now? But I've worked all day! I'm dirty. I think I broke my toe. I stink. I'm not worthy to go.

The king wants you to come, they said. Those others who were invited and refused to come are not worthy. Don't worry about yourself - we'll take care of everything. We'll get you washed up and give you a wedding garment to wear. You're going to love it! You think it looks good from here? Wait til you see the inside!

Still in disbelief, they grabbed Jacob by the arm and dragged, him, limping, into the king's compound. He still didn't believe what was happening. Was he dreaming? They gave him the royal treatment. He had never worn clothes like this before - so soft and new. He almost felt like a son of the king himself. And then they took him into the banquet hall. Oh my! He didn't know there was that much gold in all the world! And they didn't seat him in the back - but right up front! Right near the king's table. And the food started coming and the wine started flowing . . . he forgot all about the throbbing in his toe.

Until . . . he looked up and saw the look on the king's face. He was not happy. Was the king looking at him? He *knew* this was too good to be true! How could he have been so foolish to think he could be here. He wasn't worthy, he wasn't good, he was now going to

get what he deserved - thrown out and killed.

But no. The king spoke to a person at the next table, not him. It was Simeon. Jacob had worked with him a couple times. He had actually just spoken with him a few moments ago, when he asked Simeon why he was still wearing his work clothes and hadn't washed, and told him that he stank. Simeon had replied: *Aren't I good enough for the king just as I am? Does he think he's better than me? I'm not going to play his little washing and dress up game.* Jacob didn't get it.

Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment? the king said. Silence. *Simeon, give him an answer! Say something! What are you doing?* But Simeon just kept eating and drinking. Well, the king was furious. ***Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness.*** And before Jacob could blink, Simeon was gone. And another came and took his place. And the king's joy returned. *Eat, my friends! Drink! Dance! Rejoice! Rejoice for my son!*

Friends. Jacob, stone cutter: friend of the king. This had been a strange - but wonderful! - day indeed.

And a day that you, too, will enjoy. Not because you're worthy, but because God has sent His servants to call you to His feast. And even though your clothes are filthy with sin and you reek of death, you have been washed clean from your sin and death in Holy Baptism and clothed with Christ. And so there's a place for you. The King of all creation wants you there. To rejoice with Him. His joy cannot be stopped. And to have you there gives Him great joy.

And not just you. The people you work with, that person you passed by the other day and didn't even notice; the guy sleeping on the park bench, the girl walking the streets, the gang member, the guy in prison; blue collar, white collar, or no collar; stone cutter, business man, or executive. Doesn't matter. Come and be washed, be clothed with Christ, and rejoice in the feast of the King. The feast we get a *foretaste* of here, as we receive the Body and Blood of Christ. But the feast we will enjoy forever when we not just die, but when we die *and rise* with Christ - the Son of God who came and died and rose for us, to give us life, to open the Kingdom of heaven, the King's feast, to all who believe. To all washed by Him and clothed with Him.

It is sad, though, that some will not come. He sent servant after servant, prophet after prophet, apostles, pastors, martyrs, friends. But work or sleep or golf - or what else? - seems more important . . . *maybe even to us, sometimes.* And some think they are good enough just as they are, like Simeon. That our own good works and goodness should be enough for God. That they don't need His washing or clothing . . . *maybe even us, sometimes.* When we look at ourselves or compare ourselves to others. But it is not so. It's just that we're so used to seeing sin that we don't realize how bad it is, how far we

have fallen. And we smell death so much that we don't realize how bad we smell either. And this sin and death - that we have both inherited and that we have added thereto - disqualify us and make us unworthy. *As we are. On our own.*

But like Jacob, we are not on our own. The King wants you there. So much so, in fact, that the One who told this parable is the One who makes it possible for you. Jesus provides the washing you need and the clothes you need. Or as the prophet Isaiah put it today: ***he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness.*** Your filthy rags have been taken away. The stench of death has been overcome. And in their place you have been given righteousness and life. To feast at the King's feast! The feast which has no end.

So while in this world and life it may not be possible to do as Paul said today, in the reading from Philippians: to ***rejoice in the Lord, always***, we will one day. For the day of the feast is coming. That day of joy and only pure joy. For the King must share His feast and His joy.

Until then, we do our stone cutting, or whatever your vocations are, wherever God has put you and given you to do. We might even drop stones onto our toes sometimes! And so we come limping to this feast and look forward to the next. We come limping to this feast and know that whatever in this world has hurt us or seems so important to us - work, play, grudges, problems, anxieties, fears, whatever - they really don't matter. You are washed, you are cleansed, you are robed, and you are fed. The King has taken care of everything. What you do now, here in this life matters and is important - *for others*. What the King does here matters and is important - **for you**.

So hear His Word, the message of His feast that He has sent. And come. Rejoice in His forgiveness. Marvel at His mercy. And feast on His love. All **for you**.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.