

SERMON
15 OCTOBER 2017

ISAIAH 25: 1 – 9
PHILIPPIANS 4: 1 – 9
MATTHEW 22; 1 – 14

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

A few years ago there was a television program named “What Not to Wear.” It was on TLC, The Learning Channel. Why the channel is called that I cannot imagine. The program is still on somewhere; perhaps you’ve seen it.

The premise of the show was that a group of women would nominate a friend whose appearance in their opinion left something to be desired, for a complete makeover, hair, clothing, and makeup. They recommended her to a man and a woman who were, apparently, fashion experts in such things. The man and the woman would then confront the subject in the presence of her friends and, with peer pressure, talk her into agreeing to this life-change, all in front of the television camera of course.

Then, on camera, they would throw away racks of all her old clothing and give her money to buy all new. The camera would follow the subject into clothing stores where she picked out clothes she liked. Of course they were awful. At which point the man and the woman, who had been watching it all on television, would appear and show her the error of her ways, selecting her wardrobe for her and then sending her off for a completely new hairstyle and facial.

The grand finale was, of course, her reappearance before the crowd that had nominated her, wearing her new look, to their appreciative cheers and tears. Actually, I can’t imagine why she would want to associate with that crowd again. It was, I suppose, a happy ending.

Or so it seemed.

There was a young lady in California who liked to wear gossamer wings. Blue gossamer wings. She wore them at work, at leisure, while shopping. She wore

them all the time and her friends took exception to it. Personally, I can't understand it.

Happy and I lived in San Francisco in the mid 1960's at the height of the Hippie movement. Frankly, she didn't look so strange to us. She was, I think, simply a free spirit. Free spirits are people who see the world not as it is, but as it could be, as it should be. There is a childlike simplicity in that vision, a sense of what is right and what is wrong, what is fair and what is not. In our time, strange as it may have been, there were lots of free spirits in California. Such as my cousin Bill.

My cousin Bill who I have mentioned before, the one who set fire to my grandfather's lawn, lived on a mountaintop near San Francisco and, and rather late in life, took to wearing a kilt. He observed that "The entire North American continent slopes gently East to West and sooner or later everything loose ends up in California."

The lady in gossamer wings was turned in by her so-called friends to the man and the woman for the full treatment. They took away her wings! In the end, in her new clothes with her new hair and her new face, without her wings, she looked like everyone else, like all her friends, as she appeared all newly made over. And yet there was something in her expression, perhaps it was her eyes that said "I left my wings out there in the hall."

Strange tale of your youth in California, Father Ingeman; why are you telling us all this?

It's because while reading again this passage from Matthew, particularly verses 11 to 14, I realized that I may have been missing the point for all these years. I give you my alternative interpretation of the reading.

I have always seen the story, and many of the Christian commentaries have said, that the King providing the feast is God and the feast is a metaphor for the "Heavenly Banquet" that is the reward of the faithful. The man sitting there without a wedding robe is a sinner or nonbeliever; they say the wedding robes are supposed to symbolize the white baptismal robes of the early church that are still used today in some denominations. So, if you don't have a baptismal robe,

meaning that you are not baptized, you can't be at the banquet. That may have been true in the early days of the faith but it's not exactly inclusive.

Here is my alternative. What if the king is simply a king, a symbol of power representing the culture of Jesus' time? What if the robes are the symbol of those who have given themselves over to a culture in which the poor and the sick are cast out. What if the man without a robe, the powerless, counter-cultural man at the table is one of us; what if it is Jesus?

He doesn't look like the others. He doesn't act like the others. It simply isn't acceptable.

He threatens no one. He is simply present, but the awareness of His presence is an unspoken challenge and criticism of that culture. He is a constant reminder for them of those who have not been invited to the feast, of those who are beneath the notice of those at the table, and so He too is cast out, "Thrown into the outer darkness."

Those He finds there in that supposed "outer darkness" are those who long for, those who need the light of hope and love. They need "The light of Christ." In that light they may see the world as it is may give way to it as it could and should be.

There is still an awful lot of darkness out there today. There are days when the darkness seems to grow even darker. The need for the light in the darkness is now as great as, perhaps greater than, it ever was.

Consider the event at Las Vegas last week. Consider all the other events over the years. What do they say about the culture that has expelled Jesus from the table? Will those wearing wedding robes speak about the pervasive violence? No; they will shake their heads, say "tsk, tsk," and go on as though nothing had happened.

You know we all have those blue gossamer wings hidden away somewhere. We all wore them when we were very small, when we were immortal, and invincible and the world was a magical place of opportunities and imagination. It was a world in which every day was complete in itself and the wings let us soar though them.

Then long ago, someone, perhaps like the man and the woman on television, said “You can’t wear those wings” and they took them away and made us up to look and be just like everybody else.

It seems to me that if that light, the light of Christ, is to penetrate the darkness that has come into our world, it’s our job.

It seems to me that if we are to do our job, to restore that sense of wonder in a world where there is room at the table for everyone, we need to restore that long-ago sense of opportunity and imagination, a sense that the lady on “What not to Wear” had never lost. Perhaps it’s time to dust off our own metaphoric blue gossamer wings and recapture a bit of the free spirit that called us to speak out and champion what is right and just and to see the world once again as it could be, as it should be.

In His Holy Name.