

**Matthew 22:1-14  
Creekside COB  
October 17, 2004**

### **“Wearing the Proper Attire”**

**When I invite people to church, they sometimes ask, "What should I wear?" "We prefer that you wear clothes," I tell them. "Wear what makes you comfortable. Dress casually." Casual dress has a rather wide definition.**

**Casual dress, however, is subject to broad interpretation. Several years ago I officiated a wedding in Illinois. The rehearsal dinner was on a double deck party boat cruising on Lake Geneva in Wisconsin. I was told we should dress casually. I interpreted casual to mean blue jeans and a descent shirt. But Twig wasn't so sure. We arrived at the rehearsal in jeans. Everyone else was wearing Bill Blass blazers and Anne Taylor fashions. We felt like the Clampets dining with the Drysdales'.**

**Today, casual attire is the norm. It used to be that in the office, appropriate dress meant professional attire. Then companies adopted casual Fridays. Khakis and sweaters replaced suits and ties. Some companies have adopted casual dress as standard attire. It used to be that people dressed-up to go to visitation at funeral homes. Now they go dressed in clothing suitable for the bowling alley.**

**Then there is the church. My Grandpa Bibbee owned one suit. Six-and-a-half days a week he wore bib overalls, but on Sunday morning he wore his "go to meetin'" suit. As a kid I fought tooth and nail against Sunday morning Brilcreamed hair and clip-on ties. I was told that being bathed and dressed in your best was the way we revered worship in God's house. Looking at you, I don't see many guys in suits or women in hats, gloves, and high-heeled shoes. You are decidedly casual.**

**There is a generational divide on this issue. One generation says that when we worship we honor God with our devotion and our best selves. The clothes we wear are a reflection of offering to God the best we have. The younger generations asks, "Does what I wear to church really matter to God? Will God refuse to honor my worship if I'm wearing shorts and athletic shoes? Which is most important to God, the clothes I wear, or the attitude in which I worship Him? It's no big deal what I wear as long as I'm here."**

**This morning I want to talk with you about the proper Christian attire. What we wear to worship matters, but not in the ways you think.**

**Those of you who dress casually will not care much for today's lesson about the man who came underdressed to a wedding reception.**

**On the surface the parable of the marriage feast is outrageous. A king threw a huge marriage reception for his son. The tables were set. The food was ready to serve. The king sent out servants to call those who received invitations but didn't return their RSVP's. They didn't heed the servant's personal invitations, either. So the king sent more servants. He was determined to have a party.**

**"Come to the feast! The prime rib is done to perfection. The Champaign is chilled. The king is waiting." You've heard the expression, "Don't shoot the messenger." No one bothered to tell the people on the guest list. "The king wants you to come to the wedding. He says it won't be a party without y...." "BANG!" All the servants were killed. The king was enraged. All who received an invitation were killed and their city was burned to the ground. Not even Martha Stewart is THAT mean!" The guests were crossed off the guest list... permanently. Given the time it took to send two posies to fetch the guests, declare war, mobilize troops, and destroy a city, the food was very cold.**

**Very strange. But remember how Jesus began the parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who had a**

marriage feast for his son." This isn't your typical wedding party. God is the king. Jesus is the son. God wanted everyone to come to the party. They hadn't respond to his written invitations, so he sent messengers and prophets. And the people said, "Here's what we think of your king and his invitation," and they killed them.

But angry as the king was, he was determined to have a party. He called the servants he had left, and told them go into the streets and invite anyone they saw to the wedding feast. The good, respectable, law abiding, tax paying, God-fearing citizens, AND the bad-- addicts, and people with criminal records. "Round them up and bring them in."

The dining hall was full. When the king arrived he spotted a guy who wasn't properly attired. What did the king expect? Do you dress up in wedding attire every day just in case someone invites you to a reception? And yet, all the others were properly dressed. Where did they find tuxedos and formal gowns on short notice?

You need to know that back then, wedding hosts were responsible for providing clothing for the guest, but there the guy sat, wearing cut-offs and a T-shirt. He knew that garments were provided, but he didn't bother changing. The king asked, "How did you get in here wearing those clothes?"

I can only imagine what he was thinking. "I didn't have to come to this party. You should be glad I'm here. I'm helping you get rid of all this warmed over food. You're not going to let a little thing like clothing to spoil the evening, are you?" Maybe he just wanted to draw attention to himself.

My son John and I observe a tradition on his birthday. We go to the "Windy City" for dinner at the Chicago Chop House. Last year John invited a friend. I said, "Be sure to tell him the restaurant has a dress policy." When I picked them up I couldn't believe my eyes. Dane wore a sharp suit, but I didn't notice it because of his hair. Before I could speak, John said, "We called the Chop House and asked if it was okay to have spiked hair.

**They said its fine." Words cannot do justice to his appearance. Using an entire bottle each of mousse, gel, and a large bottle of Elmer's Glue-yes, glue, a friend fashioned fourteen foot-long hair horns sticking straight out of his head. I never knew it was possible to do such a thing with hair. He looked like a cross between a cartoon character and Medusa. I said, "If they won't let you in the Chop House, you're on your own, pal."**

**I still can't believe they seated us. Do you know how it feels knowing that every time you look up, people are staring at you? If being the center of attention was Dane's goal, he achieved it. Maybe the maitre d' considered telling the staff do to him what the king ordered done to the disrespectful guest-tie him up with duct tape and throw him in the alley dumpster.**

**Remember-- this is a parable about God's kingdom. The second group invited to the feast, the Gentiles who became Christians, had no beliefs to build upon. They responded eagerly to Paul's message of God's grace and forgiveness, but without something to build upon, they thought it meant that they could live as they pleased. It caused problems in the church because the Gentiles didn't recognize the importance of the Lord's Table. They thought they could show up in their pajamas, eat like pigs, and drink like fish.**

**Mr. Under Dressed thought attire and attitude didn't matter to the king. But it did matter. God has invited us to the party. It's a wonderful invitation that calls for more than just "coming as we are." Rich Brand said:**

***"The Kingdom of God is not just one wild, happy, silly, senseless fraternity party where everyone drinks till they throw up or pass out... Jesus wanted us to realize that this Kingdom of God is a fearful, awesome place where we are invited to come and share the dignity and the work of the Kingdom of God."***

**Just because you are invited to the party at the last minute doesn't mean you can come however you want. Being invited is a big deal-the biggest deal of your life, which means care must**

**be taken about the clothes we wear. But like I said, everything in this parable stands for something else, including the wedding garment. It is not an article of clothing at all. IT IS YOUR LIFE. It's not what you wear on Sunday but how you act on Monday.**

**The second batch of guests was made up of the good and the bad. Our motivations for coming to church are also good and bad. In case you haven't noticed, these pews aren't full. Everyone is invited, but most people decided to do something else with their Sunday morning. But just because attendance is slim, don't get the idea that you can just "show up" however you please and think that you're doing God a big favor. God isn't looking for warm bodies.**

**It is true that God accepts us as we are. The Bible says, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." We come accepted as we are, but we're not supposed to stay that way. The King notices when we come dressed in shabby grudges and thread-worn excuses. The King notices when we come wearing skin-tight attitudes that judge others and relaxed-fit assessments of ourselves. The King notices our buttoned pockets indicating how much we have decided to share with others and how much we plan to keep for ourselves. The King notices when we show up wearing pants and shirts that don't match. As our words and actions sometimes don't match.**

**Maybe one way to drive this message home is to dress the ushers in police uniforms-handcuffs, pepper spray, guns, the works. Grant them the authority to pick people out of the pews and ask, "How did you get in here dressed like that? Why aren't you wearing the proper attire?"**

**What matters most in honoring God is not your wardrobe. Whether you wear Ralph Lauren, Land's End, or Levis doesn't matter. When the King invites you to the wedding you must do more than WEAR the proper attire. You must BE the proper attire.**

**Christians should be the best dressed people in the world. It means being a servant, showing compassion, extending care,**

**offering forgiveness, radiating grace, working for peace, fighting injustice, standing up for the truth, and professing Jesus as Lord.**

**In Galatians 3:27 it says, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." When we do this, the King will look over the crowd assembled for the wedding feast and say, "You look simply marvelous."**

***\*\*This sermon was inspired by a sermon from Barbara Brown Taylor, "Wedding Dress," published in her book, Home by Another Way.***