SERMON SUNDAY BETWEEN 9 AND 15 OCTOBER OS28a:
THE DIOCESE OF BUNBURY: 11 OCTOBER 2026:
GEOFF CHADWICK:
WEDDING GARMENT

Gospel Reading
Matthew 22.1-14
1 Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: **2** 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. **3** He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. **4** Again he sent other slaves, saying, "Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet." **5** But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, **6** while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them. **7** The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. **8** Then he said to his slaves, "The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. **9** Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet." **10** Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests. **11** 'But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, **12** and he said to him, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?" And he was speechless. **13** Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." **14** For many are called, but few are chosen.'

Today's parable (or should I say parables) is clearly an allegory of the experiences of the early church. Mathew has taken Luke's version and moulded them to speak to the experience of his church at around AD90. Matthew has militarised the parable in order to make sense of the mayhem of the destruction of the temple some 20 years earlier.

Curiously he has conflated two parables into one. The story of the wedding feast and the story of the wedding garment have been fused so that each can speak to the meaning of the other.

The allergy makes the point that the people initially invited to the wedding feast are the Jews. In the story, this is the banquet in honour of the King's Son, that is, Jesus. They rejected the invitation, and so are destroyed by invading armies. This is a clear reference to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD70.

So others, who are “good and bad” are invited to take the place of the initial invitees. This, of course is a reference to the early church whose members were a “grab-bag” of people off the streets.

Having said this, we must be very careful when referring to the Jews. It is only *some* Jews who rejected Jesus, not *all* Jews. After all, the first Christians were Jews!

This is a problem with allegory- it’s too easy to lump people into prejudiced categories.

Now the second parable of the wedding garment gets slipped into the story. Someone has got into the banquet without wearing the correct clothing. The punishment is extreme; banishment into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth! Such treatment would violate our modern standards of ethics, but we must remember that it is an allegory!

I’ve always been troubled by the man with the wrong garment! As a young boy, as a teenager, and even as an adult I’ve never been fond of changing clothes. Even so, I will concede that it’s probably not a good idea to wear your “Sunday best” when painting the house!

The description of the wedding garment has led to a fair bit of speculation by biblical scholars. Most have settled on the idea of clean garments.

Rather than being a special outfit, the parable is probably referring the custom of the time to wear clean garments for special occasions. Wearing dirty cloths to an event was showing disrespect towards the host.

Joachim Jeremias, a well respected NT scholar offers two interpretations of the parable that I like very much. He writes:

> *What exactly did Jesus mean by the clean garment which was the necessary condition for admission to the wedding-feast? Here we must choose between the rabbinic answer and the Gospel's. The rabbinic answer will be found in b. Shab. 153a, as follows:*
>
> *A Palestinian theologian of the end of the first century AD, R. Eliezer*

> *said: 'Repent one day before your death. His scholars asked him: How can a man know the day of his death? He answered them: Since he may die tomorrow, it is all the more necessary to repent today; thus all through his life he will be found in a state of penitence. Moreover, Solomon in his wisdom has said: Let thy garments be always white; and let not thy head lack ointment' (Eccles. 9.8).*
>
> *In explanation of this saying there follows a parable of Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai (c. AD 80) about a king who issued invitations to a banquet, without specifying the hour. The wise attired themselves, while the foolish went on with their work. Suddenly the summons came, and those who were not dressed in clean clothes were not admitted to the banquet. Here the implication is unmistakable: the festal garment is repentance. Put it on the day before your death, the day before the Deluge breaks, put it on today!*
>
> *The demand of the crisis is conversion. But there is another interpretation of the metaphor of the Wedding-Garment which stems from the Old Testament, and it is clear from the general tenor of Jesus' teaching that he had the second interpretation in mind...*
>
> *The white robe, or the garment of life and Glory, is a symbol of the righteousness awarded by God (cf. esp. Isa. 61.10), and to be clothed with this garment is a symbol of membership of the redeemed community.*
> (Jeremias J.1972, *The Parables of Jesus*, SCM Press, London, pp 188-189)

So our banqueting garment is one symbolising penitence and redemption. Accordingly, we are warned that not wearing them leads to expulsion and darkness.

We are reminded that our attitude as banqueters should not one of exclusivity but one of gratitude. We are warned not think of ourselves as the “in crowd” whilst rejecting others as the “out crowd”. Such attitudes are a slippery path into darkness.

So let us:

- Remember to repent every day, just like putting on a clean shirt.
- And remember that being redeemed must come with a good dose of humility.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.