

## "The Garments of Salvation"

Isaiah 61:10 - 62:37

2 January Anno Domini 2005

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Emmett, Idaho

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*All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and His Name shall be called Emmanuel," which means, God with us (Matthew 1:22-23).*

Dear blessed of Christ Jesus and faithful followers of our Redeemer, may God's grace and mercy be multiplied unto you and yours as we await the true Light of Epiphany.

One of the most beloved folktales is that of Cinderella. One of the oldest literary renderings is a Chinese version dating to the 9th century A.D. In Europe alone over 500 variations of Cinderella have been recorded. Many children have watched the Walt Disney version of the story. I imagine that for girls the favorite part is Cinderella's wardrobe. Several times in the story Cinderella exchanges her dirty rags for a beautiful dress: first, the dress which she makes with the help of her animal friends; then, the dress which her fairy godmother magically produces; and finally, the beautiful wedding dress she wears when she marries the handsome prince.

Our story as Christians is a "Cinderella story" as well -- a story of "rags to riches" -- a wonderful exchange of garments -- from the garments of condemnation to the garments of salvation. The best thing about our story is this: it is not an old folktale, it is not a fairytale, it is not a myth, rather, it is absolutely true! Listen to our sermon text this morning. It is from Isaiah chapters 61 and 62. In doing so, we will reflect on ...

.... The Garments of Salvation!

*I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful 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 with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its bud, as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the LORD God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations. For Zion's sake I will not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burns. The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the LORD will name. You shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.*

This is the Word of the LORD our God.

Once again, our story as Christians is a "Cinderella story," a story of "rags to riches," a wonderful exchange of garments, from the "garments of condemnation" to "garments of salvation." Let's consider the garments of condemnation. This is the really ugly part of the story. It is a difficult, but

very necessary, part for us to hear. What were we wearing before we were blessed with the garments of salvation? In answering that question, God does not mince words as you will soon hear. God even uses words which are rather repulsive to us and words which we do not even speak about. The LORD has used these offensive words to describe to us His reaction to our sin and our sinfulness.

The first concerning the garments of condemnation is naked. In other words, having no garments at all. In the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve sinned they knew that they were naked, they attempted to cover their nakedness with fig leaves, and they hid from God. The LORD confronts Adam and the man responds: I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid. Because of the Fall into sin, our nakedness before God produces shame, fear, and guilt. We desire to run away from God and hide; or worse still, to cover ourselves with garments of our own making.

The second word concerning the garments of condemnation is filthy rags. The prophet Isaiah, in describing our attempts to please God apart from faith and apart from Christ, writes that All our righteous acts are like filthy rags. The Hebrew of that verse literally says "a garment of menstruation" -- one worn during that time. God uses that kind of language to describe His repulsion for good works apart from faith in Christ Jesus. In the prophet Zechariah, Joshua the high priest, representing all Israel, stands before the LORD. He is dressed in filthy clothes. The Hebrew literally says "clothes with excrement," representing the sin of Israel, and our sin as well.

The third image used by the LORD in His Word is that of "improper garments." In the Parable of the Wedding Banquet, When the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. "Friend," he asked, "how did you get in here without wedding clothes?" The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Such is our dress by nature, and such is the eternal destination of those who attempt to "dress themselves" for entrance into God's banquet with their own "righteousness."

What would we expect God's reaction to shameful naked people, or people clothed with filthy rags and clothes with excrement, or improper and inappropriate garments? Well, what would be your reaction? One afternoon, several summers ago a man walked up the sidewalk completely naked. Our reaction? Call the police and lock the doors. What would your reaction be to someone at your door dressed in clothes covered with human excrement, or someone wearing inappropriate clothing? Again, lock the doors and hope that the person goes away. While you might wish to give that other person a set of clean clothes, never would you ever think of asking that person if you could have his clothes to wear.

Not so with Christ, and here we come to the garments of salvation. What we would not think of doing, the eternal Son of God did. The LORD our God, out of sheer mercy and grace, has clothed us in Christ with garments of salvation and arrayed us in robes of righteousness. Do you remember that hymn stanza? "Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness, My beauty are, my glorious dress; Mid flaming worlds, in these arrayed, With joy shall I lift up my head." Jesus took upon Himself our "garments of condemnation" and gave us instead His "garments of salvation."

Jesus took the guilt and shame of our nakedness upon Himself that we might be clothed with His perfect forgiveness. The soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole garrison around Him. And they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. His shed Blood ran down to His garments from where the crown of thorns impaled Him and soaked into His

garments from where the lashes of the scourging whip tore His back. Blood shed for you and me. Even from the manger, the swaddling clothes should be considered improper for the King of kings and the LORD of lords.

Jesus took upon Himself our "garments of condemnation" and gave us instead His "garments of salvation." He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. This glorious exchange is the message of the Church, the Bride of Christ.

Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation. The human soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Let belief in Jesus' person and life come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's. For if Christ is the Bridegroom, then He must take upon Himself the things which are the Bride's and bestow upon Her the things that are His.

Christ is God and man in one person. His righteousness, life, and salvation are unconquerable, eternal, and omnipotent. By the wedding ring of faith, He shares in the sins, death, and pains of hell which are of this world, and in which, His Bride the Church lives. As a matter of fact, He makes them His own and acts as if He Himself had sinned. He suffered, died, and experienced hell that He might overcome them all for His Bride. So He takes to Himself a glorious Bride, without spot or wrinkle, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word.

The literal garments which Christ wore on earth can remind us of this joyous exchange: His Birth as a naked infant; wrapped by Mary in swaddling clothes; the torn, dirty, Blood- stained garments of His suffering passion; and the strips of linen encasing His Body in the tomb. This Good News is told and as people believe it, the robe of Christ's righteousness becomes theirs. This great exchange takes place, as Luther says, through faith, created by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. Dear friends, the Bible declares, All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

So the garments of salvation become also the garments of celebration and proclamation. Clothed in Christ's righteousness, the Bride of Christ (the Church -- you and me) -- we cannot help but delight greatly in the Lord and rejoice in our God.

That celebration naturally spills over to proclamation. We desire to share with others the good news of this joyous exchange and the wonderful wardrobe that has been purchased for all by Christ's precious Blood poured out on the cross. If the LORD Himself will not keep silent and will not remain quiet for the sake of Zion and Jerusalem -- for the sake of the Church, how can we remain silent?

Dear people of God, think for a minute if you received clothes for Christmas. Often people will have to exchange them because they do not fit or are not quite what was wanted. The Good News of God in Christ is this: the greatest Christmas gift of all is the clothing you received from God through Jesus Christ, the garments of salvation and the robe of righteousness of which Isaiah speaks in our text.

You will never have to exchange this clothing which you received by virtue of Christ's great exchange with you. These garments are tailor-made for you; they fit you perfectly, and they will always be exactly what you need for every occasion.

They fit the infant girl brought to the LORD in Baptism -- they fit the old man residing in the nursing home -- and everyone in between. These clothes will never wear out or lose their beauty. The garments of salvation given to you by Christ are guaranteed to last and to remain beautiful forever. In fact, we have yet to see or to comprehend the full glory of their beauty.

Put on these garments again daily as you recall your Baptism. Put them on joyfully, gratefully, in true Christian pride, and be prepared to share with others the Good News of this great exchange that Christ has also accomplished for them.

Please listen, once more, to this beautiful text from Isaiah .....

*I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful 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 with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its bud, as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the LORD God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations. For Zion's sake I will not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burns. The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the LORD will name. You shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.*