

Sermons at the Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Title: Dressing for the occasion?

Preached by Rev. Geoff Read on Sunday 23rd^h June 2019

Text: Galatians 3:26-27, Luke 8:26ff

We are psychosomatic beings – that means that there is a strong connection between the outside and the inside, the physical and the inner life

We are not split into body, mind, spirit – we are essentially whole creatures in which each of those parts of our reality are intimately interconnected

Which is why I think clothes matter

I beg your pardon?

Yes – clothes matter!

Clearly what we choose to wear for any occasion has the ability to affect our mood, our self-confidence, our ability to fulfill a particular role

It also communicates the particular lifestyle we may aspire to, the group or subculture we wish to belong to

I'm not sure if we have any former punks here this morning – but any of you who can think back to a slightly wild teenagerhood can probably remember parents saying, "You're not going out in that!"

Have you noticed how you feel fitter when put on a tracksuit?

And I'm really not sure what I am trying to say when I sometimes wear shorts under my cassock – other than it's really hot and we no longer live Reformation England

But what we put on and put off often reflects our mood, our aspirations, our values

Had you noticed that clothes play an important part on our two Bible readings this morning

The healed man was found at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind, in sharp contrast to the tormented figure who meets Jesus as he stepped ashore – “For a long time he had not worn clothes or lived in a house..”

Paul, writing to the Galatians urges them to remember that “as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ...” (3:27)

In this context the image of taking off an old garment and putting on a new one is not a call to particular ethical behaviour, a holy lifestyle as it is elsewhere, but simply to be what you are – a new status, a new way of being, not based on works but on grace

In other words, in both readings clothing comes to represent the power of Jesus to transform lives

In Luke's account the man's nakedness was part of the terribly disintegrated state caused by being overpowered by demons

In his so called “Kingdom manifesto” at the start of his ministry, Jesus announces that he has come to bring good news to the poor, freedom to captives (Luke 4:14ff)

And what we see happen in that encounter is the defeat of the power of evil over this man's life – a reversal of the disorder, a coming of a new order, a freeing from captivity – the gentle but powerful rule of the King now transforming His life

In Galatians, Paul is writing to counter a new teaching that was beginning to assert itself in the young churches of the area

In fact, it wasn't a new teaching but the reassertion of old teaching: namely that for Gentile believers, faith alone in Christ was not enough – they also needed to observe the demands of the Jewish Law

Paul says no: you have taken off the old robe of religion, of seeking to earn God's favour or to become righteous through keeping the Law and so forth

You have been given a new robe: one freely given by God – a righteousness, acceptance by God through all that His Son Jesus has achieved through his death and resurrection – all that we can desire but all that we are unable to achieve in our own right

It is possible that what Paul is thinking of is how, in the early Church, this new status was symbolised at baptism: a candidate would literally take off their old clothes, enter the baptismal water naked and then emerge out the other side to be given a new, white robe

As one writer puts it: we strip off the clothes of the old life to be clothed with the garments of Christ's righteousness through faith and baptism

Put on Christ – and keep him on: be what you truly are: You are sons of God through faith in Christ – sons here is a legal term, and covers here both men and women (3:28), a particular status in a family of the time: who knows, maybe even with particular clothes signifying this – think of the parable of the prodigal son and how he is clothed on his return

Paul continues: READ 4:6-7

Here is our true identity, our true status as Xians

But you know – living in the world, it is so easy to forget what we really are, and start being drawn to signs of other sources of significance and identity

One of the great Christian writers of the last century was Oswald Chambers, who wrote a classic book, *My Utmost for His Highest*

Chambers writes: "It is much easier to do something than to trust in God; we see the activity and mistake panic for inspiration. That is why we see so few fellow workers with God, yet so many people working for God. We would much rather work for God than believe in him. Do I really believe that God will do in me what I cannot do? The degree of hopelessness I have for others comes from never realizing that God has done anything for me. Is my own personal experience such a wonderful realization of God's power and might that I can never have a sense of hopelessness for anyone else I see? Has any spiritual work been accomplished in me at all? The degree of panic activity in my life is equal to the degree of my lack of personal spiritual experience." - Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

It was very obvious what had happened in the life of the demoniac – the literal clothing clearly showed that change

What Chambers is talking about is a transformation that is just as real but is often far more subtle than even a changed lifestyle – it is about changed motivation and a changed source of power that arises from a new source of identity: **being clothed not in my own worth, my own strength, but Christ's**

I wonder whether we are so used to dressing for the occasion – for leisure, for work, for formal occasions, for “smart casual”, for Church that we take this over into our lives as Xians

What will we allow to drive us in different situations – when we find ourselves in situations that ordinarily would trigger anger, competitiveness, ambition: will we just try harder, or live out of our

own old natural identity and power, the old clothes or will we consistently choose to clothe ourselves with Christ, live out our identity as sons of God – given worth and power by our Father in heaven, a wonderful freedom to be what we truly are

The call here is to put on and keep on one thing: to be clothed with Christ in any and every situation

READ Gal 3:26-27 and 4:6-7