

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Last week US Senate Majority leader Chuck Schumer did away with the dress code for senators. Now senators like John Fetterman can legally enter the senate chambers wearing his usual hoodie and shorts. I smile inside imagining the famous colonial paintings featuring George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson assembled in Congress wearing hoodies and shorts. That would make a good velvet wall poster hung next to the cigar-smoking dogs sitting around a poker table.

But why a dress code in the first place? Dress codes are everywhere. We know the rules: Formal; Business; Business Casual; Casual; Beach. Many schools have dress codes. Offices have dress codes. Parties and Galas have dress codes. We even have a dress code in the church. Not so much for you, but definitely for me. I am reminded of the young pastor who showed up for the Sunday service wearing jeans and a Batman T-shirt. He isn't a pastor anymore. Why dress codes? First, some people have no taste or respectable fashion smarts when it comes to picking out clothes for various occasions. They embarrass themselves and grate on the sensibilities of others. Like children, someone else needs to help them pick out suitable outfits. Second, dress codes provide uniformity which takes the attention off what everyone is wearing and puts it on the main thing. In a world of individuals with a rainbow full of individuality, sometimes a bit of sameness can just feel safe and proper.

And so it is in the Kingdom of God. While we all have different gifts and strengths and levels of spiritual productivity, on its most basic level we are all the same. We were all sinners bound for the lake of fire. We're all the same. Now we are all children of God and citizens of heaven saved by grace and the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ shed for us on the cross. We're all the same.

Jesus' poor disciples lived in a world just like ours that was full of social rankings. They figured that since they were part of Jesus' inner circle – the 12 – that surely there was glory and honor for them to be had. Remember how a few weeks ago they asked Jesus which of them would be the greatest in the kingdom? The

question Peter asked that introduces today's lesson was, "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" Jesus had to play a constant game of Whack-a-Mole to keep the disciples' ambitions and pride from hopping on a runaway train to perdition. With this swing of his hammer against their pride, Jesus told the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard, or better named as the parable of the Generous Master.

It's a simple plot. A master hires people to work in his vineyard. He hires workers at 6 am, 9 am, noon, 3 pm, and 5 pm. 6 pm is quitting time. All the workers line up at the table for their pay. Everybody gets the same amount of money. Grumbling ensues as those hired especially at 6 and 9 am see the later hires get the same as them. There is the tension. Jesus' point is simply that as the laborers hired at earlier and later times of the day got the same pay out of the owner's generosity, everyone who enters the kingdom of God also does so out of the generosity of God. We all get the same benefit – salvation. Everyone is treated the same. Everyone receives the same benefit. Everyone is equal.

Equality is a big word in our society. In this nation's Declaration of Independence it is asserted that all men are created equal. That jibes with what Jesus is saying. As good as it sounds, putting it to ink is far easier than making it a reality. Even now fires of equality burn. But they are different fires than the ones stoked by the founders. We cannot help but be affected by their heat. We pledge we are one nation under God. Our money says we are one people that have come from many peoples, e pluribus unum. That is a rare and unusual thing in the history of people. But now we hear the voices crying for diversity, equity of outcomes, and inclusion. When you say something in disagreement with these policies you are painted as a racist. If you do agree with these movements, then using Identity Politics and critical race theory you will categorize every straight, white, Christian as an oppressor. And men even more than the women. While everything seems to be about equality, in reality the hoax is that we actually live in a culture now saturated with monocultures, inequity, and exclusion. I say all this not in judgement of any of it, but as a warning that current trends can dislodge us from the way of Jesus' equality unto that of people like Karl Marx, where we pelt each other with labels like Trumpkin deplorables and Rich Men North of Richmond. There is one truth that at the speed of light resets us all back as equals. This truth is that we all only have one enemy: the Prince of Darkness. That makes us all equals again. Equally damned and children of Satan. Now equally saved and

children of God Most High. Not because of anything we have done, but by Jesus Christ who delivers us from the chains of sin and death, shields us from the final judgement, and rescues us from destruction. The United Auto Workers can strike for better pay and benefits. We have no such case with God. We have done no work that might earn us his benefits. He owes us nothing.

While the US Senate has ditched its dress code for senators, heaven has not. There the dress code stands. In order to enter such a formal event of celestial proportions, you must be properly clothed. You must receive the robe of Christ's righteousness, holiness, and perfection. It's the only way in to heaven. It's the only way to gain entrance. This is why Jesus became one of us – human. He took on our nature so that he might give us his nature. Jesus was and is perfect and sinless in every way. When he died on the cross, he was not dying for any sins of his own. He died bearing ours. All of them. When he suffered the horrors of hell, it was not because he was judged. It was because of the judgement upon us that he claimed as his own. Jesus hung on the cross of Calvary unclothed except for a crown of thorns. He hung there in all his nakedness that he might clothe us with his glory. Back in Eden God hid the nakedness of Adam and Eve with the skins of animals. Now Jesus covers our shame with himself. That what we mean when we say we are *in Christ*. All who have been baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ and are regarded as righteous, holy, and perfect in the eyes of our Father in heaven.

We dare not think our upright conservative lifestyle, prayers, charity, and involvement in church life qualify us for God's salvation more than other lesser folks. On the other hand, we need not live in uncertainty and fear as to whether or not God will receive us on our last day. Today Jesus gives us the parable of the Generous Master in which he assures us it is never too late to enter his vineyard kingdom. But I do encourage you to make that day today.

In the midst of this teaching of Jesus to Peter and The Twelve on the importance of humility, Jesus does also make them a stunning promise. *Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."* Matt. 19:28 Not too shabby, eh? Jesus cut the disciples down to size with the parable. He also promises them what seems to be their real hearts' desire. Don't forget Jesus does the same with us. Jesus warns us about the

potential pride and despair surrounding the entering his vineyard kingdom. But do you remember how through the Apostle Paul Jesus gives us a similar promise as his did to the twelve? *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* Eph. 2:5-7

What's good for The Twelve is good for us. And the Lord has made good on it all. Give thanks to God for his merciful and kind generosity in granting us all salvation. Remember he has seated you with Christ in the heavenly realms. Ask yourself what difference that is going to make in the way you live this week. Amen.

The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in him. Amen.

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