

Streetsville United Church  
Sunday, March 13, 2011  
Rev. John Tapscott

### **"ON DRESSING IN THE RIGHT CLOTHES"**

Genesis 3:7,21

Sometimes newcomers to church ask me how they should dress in church. I say the general rule today is "come as you are." Previous generations tended to dress up for church, perhaps because that was the only opportunity they had all week to do so. There was, as someone explained to me, a desire to look one's best in the presence of God. And to be honest, dressing up in our best clothes, whether it's at church or anywhere else, makes us feel pretty good about ourselves. Nowadays many people are more casual about how they dress for church, and that's OK, because God does not judge us by the clothes on our back. God is interested in the spiritual clothes we are wearing. And if we are trusting in Jesus Christ then we wearing the very best spiritual clothes. God has clothed us with Jesus Christ. Are you wearing Christ by faith?

Genesis 3 contains what theologians call "the fall." Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, caring for it as God commanded. They only had to obey God's one commandment, "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat for in the day you eat of it you shall die." But the crafty serpent asked Eve, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" perhaps raising doubts about God's word in her mind. Eve answered, "We may eat the fruit of any tree in the Garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the Garden.'" Eve was right. She added, "we shall not even touch it." Adam and Eve had gone beyond God's word in order to be safe. But the serpent tempted Eve, "You won't die, for God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Now the words good and evil had a different meaning for the Hebrews than they do for us. Of course, we need to distinguish between good and evil. But to the Hebrews the terms meant beneficial and harmful. God had given Adam and Eve all they needed, perfect fellowship with God and one another, security, and freedom within God's boundaries. But the serpent was saying, "You can discover the boundaries for living yourself. You don't need God's help to know what is beneficial and harmful. In fact, why do you need God at all? You can be your own Lord and Master." That's a hard temptation to resist. And they didn't. Eve took fruit and ate it and gave some to Adam to eat. Their eyes were opened. But the serpent had lied. They weren't like God. They didn't know good and evil.

All they knew and saw was their own nakedness.

We are tempted by many things, including food. It's a temptation I usually lose. A member of Weight Watchers went into a cafeteria one day for a coffee, black. A man with two donuts and a coffee sat down at the next table. After a while, the man got up and left, but left behind one donut untouched. To the woman it looked delicious. She bravely fought temptation for a while, but finally gave in. She reached over, picked up the donut and started to eat it. Just then the man came back with a second cup of coffee.

But more serious temptations come to us. There is the temptation to take or keep what doesn't belong to us. There are the temptations of alcohol and drugs and the temptation to overspend, with credit so readily available. There are temptations around sex and marriage. The internet brings temptations. Many people, including Christians, have been tripped up by internet porn.

Some people have unique ways of resisting temptation. One man carried a box of matches with him wherever he went. He explained that 'Whenever I go to a party and I'm tempted by a beautiful woman, I pull out a match and light it. Then I put it out with my fingers and remind myself, "Hell is a lot hotter than this."' Temptation comes to us in many ways, and while we resist many of them, we all have our weak spots where we stumble and fall.

But here's the greatest temptation of all, the one that tripped up Adam and Eve. The greatest temptation is to believe that we really don't need God. It's the temptation to believe that we can make it without him; that we can figure out what is beneficial and harmful without his Word, that we can be our own Lord and Master. This temptation comes to every human being, and we've all given in to it. At some point each one of us is the prodigal, turning from the Father and living in the far country.

There are consequences when we give in to this temptation. Certainly there were for Adam and Eve. The first was that they were naked and knew it. Their perfect relationship with God was broken. God became distant. They were now exposed to all the dangers from which God had been protecting them. Their relationship with one another was distorted. They knew shame and guilt. Pain and hard work entered the world. Even the ground itself was affected. And death entered creation. "You shall return to the ground for out of it you were taken; you are dust and to dust you shall return."

It happens to us, too. When we live as if we don't need God, then we become naked. I don't mean we have no clothes on, heaven forbid. What I mean is that

we become exposed to grave spiritual and physical dangers, sin, guilt, shame, death. Every temptation we face becomes harder to resist. The world gives witness everyday to the consequences of humans living as Master of the universe and our own lives. So much tragedy and heartache comes to us as individuals and as a race when we try to live without God and outside his boundaries. We become naked, weak, exposed.

Look back at the story. Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths to cover up their nakedness. But that loincloth was clearly inadequate, like going out into a snow storm in a tee-shirt and shorts. It left them quite exposed and God saw right through the facade. It's no wonder they tried to hide from God, because their sin and God's holiness were no longer compatible.

But the amazing thing is that God did not remove his mercy from Adam and Eve. Now to be sure, God was putting them out of the garden, but he wasn't letting them go wearing those flimsy fig leaves. Genesis 3:21, "The LORD God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and he clothed them." There in front of Adam and Eve God killed two animals and with their skins made far more substantial garments for them. Yes, life would be challenging outside the Garden as they coped with the results of their disobedience. But they would wear those skins as a reminder that God still loved and cared for them; that his mercy and protection were still there for them to rely on. "The Lord God made garments of skin for the man and his wife, and he clothed them."

Friends, God knows full well how we have given into temptation, how we have disobeyed God's commandments, and how we have tried to live as if we didn't need him. God sees our nakedness and shame. He sees through all the fig leaves we use to cover our nakedness, like bargaining with God, making excuses before him, trying to earn his favour by sacrifices and good works. But God still loves you and me and the whole human race. And in mercy God has provided an adequate covering for our spiritual nakedness - Christ. At great cost God sent his only Son into the world to share our life fully, except that he was without sin. Where Adam and Eve failed, and we fail, Jesus did not. Paul writes that "though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but humbled himself, taking the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross." When Jesus was crucified, he was stark naked, likely not even wearing the loin-cloth shown in paintings. And his physical nakedness was a sign of how he shared our spiritual nakedness. On the Cross he took our sin and shame upon himself and died in our place. Just as those animals were slain by God in the Garden to provide adequate clothing for Adam and Eve, so Christ's blood was shed on the Cross. Jesus died for us and was raised by the Father from the grave. And when we put

our trust in Christ an amazing thing happens. God clothes us with Christ. He wraps us with the righteous robes of His Son. This is true for all of us who are believers in Jesus Christ. God has clothed us with Christ. God has wrapped Christ around us. His perfect heart stands in place of our sinful heart. We are acceptable to God forever. We will die physically but we will not perish or be lost forever. Instead we shall inherit eternal life with God and all his people.

Jesus told this parable. It's in Matthew 22. When a king came in to see the guests at his son's wedding banquet, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe. He said, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?" The man was speechless. The king said, "Bind him hand and foot and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The man was not wearing proper clothes for the banquet. You need proper clothes to enter God's heavenly banquet, and those clothes are the righteous robes of Christ which God has given us to wear by faith.

And Christ is the clothing we need not only for death, but for life here and now. Clothed with Christ we are no longer naked in the world. We no longer face all the spiritual dangers of life exposed and on our own. Through Christ strength is given us to resist temptation, but even when we fall, the grace God gives us in Christ abounds even more than our sin. Paul says, "Put on the full armor of God." And that armour includes the gifts God gives us through Christ, the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness and the shield of faith, and the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. Put on those gifts which God has given to us in Christ and use them.

If you have ever been taken to the hospital in an ambulance, you probably arrive shivering, because of the shock of your illness or injury, and because you've been exposed to the elements. But there in the emergency room a nurse puts a warm blanket around you. The warmth and comfort of that blanket seems almost heaven-sent. When God clothes us with Christ, it's like a warm and comforting blanket of grace and protection is being wrapped around us.

Look, whatever clothes you wear to church are fine by me. My task is to make sure you are wearing the right spiritual clothes for this world and for that time when you meet your Maker. The Bible declares that if you are trusting in Christ then you are wearing the right clothes. God has clothed you with Christ. You are even starting to look a bit more like Christ. And if you have never trusted in him as your Saviour and Lord, I invite you this very day to put on Christ by faith.