

Clothing Ourselves with Christ

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on June 21, 1998. Scripture lessons: 1 Kings 19:1-4, 8-15a; Psalm 42; Galatians 3:23-29; Luke 8:26-39.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

I recently heard the story of a father who told his teenage son that he wouldn't be allowed to drive until he brought up his grades, started reading the Bible on a regular basis, and got a hair cut. By the end of the semester the boy brought up his grades, read his Bible every night, but he didn't get his hair cut. His father reminded him that as long as he wore long hair he wouldn't be allowed to drive. His son complained, "Dad! I've been reading the Bible and a lot of men back then wore their hair long. David had long hair. Elijah had long hair. John the Baptist had long hair. Jesus probably wore long hair." His father said, "You're right son. They did wear their hair long and none of them drove a car." The story reminded me of an article I came across last week addressed to recent high school and college graduates on how to dress for a job interview. The article instructs men not to interview wearing long hair. And women should avoid wearing bizarre haircuts.

The purpose of the article is to impress job seekers that dressing to impress employers should be a crucial part of our job search strategy. You may believe that no one should judge you by what you wear, but the reality is that employers are looking for reasons to remove you from their selection process. They're not only concerned about your resume and interview, they're also aware of the image you project. And they often make a judgment on your appearance within the first five minutes of meeting the job candidate. They're looking to see if you respect them enough to conform to their expectations. Whether we like it or not, how we dress is taken into consideration in hiring decisions. If you overdress or underdress the potential employer may feel that you really don't understand their corporate culture. Some may see you as a non-conformist, others may appreciate your independent thinking, but all will make a judgment on you based on your clothing.

The article goes on to instruct job seekers what to wear for an interview for a job in business. You should wear a white cotton shirt, although solid blue is acceptable. Shoes must

be black or dark brown leather lace up shoes. Wear comfortable dark socks; never white socks. Conservative silk ties are best. Be sure that your tie coordinates with the suit and avoid flashy patterns. Wear a dark belt, preferably black, with a plain conservative buckle. Also, for men if you wear an earring, remove it before the interview.

And women should wear skirted suits that are dark navy or gray. Shoes should be polished and coordinated with your outfit. Low to medium heels are best. Make-up should enhance your appearance without drawing attention. Avoid wearing any clothing which might distract or draw attention to yourself. If you wear nail polish, make sure it's a subtle color and neatly done. Earrings should look conservative. Avoid wearing cologne or perfume. Your hands and nails should be clean and trimmed. The article concludes with this advice. *Dress not for where you are but for where you want to be.*

That article makes me think about how Christians should dress for church. Should men wear suits and ties, or is it okay to wear Bermuda shorts and sneakers? Should women wear dresses and hats or are slacks acceptable? And is it appropriate for women to wear jewelry and make up to church? More to the point, what kind of clothing should Christians wear during the rest of the week? Should we adopt the Amish custom? The fact is Christians have worn many different kinds of clothing throughout the ages. Customs are constantly changing. Christians in other cultures, in Africa, Asia, and South America wear clothing that many of us would consider inappropriate. Many of you can remember when women would be ostracized if they came to church without a hat, or men without a suit. We live in a more casual era - some would say too casual - and most ministers would be extremely reluctant to tell anybody that what they're wearing is inappropriate. Most ministers are glad for anybody who takes the time and effort to come to church regardless of what they wear.

Although there are a few places in the Bible that instruct Christians how to dress, the Bible is mostly silent as to details. ^{Jesus said...} For example, in the scripture lesson from Paul's letter to the Galatians he writes, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." What does he mean? Paul says something similar in several of his letters. In his letter

to the Roman Christians he says, "^{clothe yourselves with}Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." Again, in his letter to Christians living in the Asian Minor city of Ephesus, "^{clothe yourselves with}Put on the whole armor of God. Fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace." And again Paul writes to the Christians in the city of Colossi, "clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience." How should Christians dress? We should clothe ourselves with Christ. We should take on the character of Christ. When others look at us they should see something of Christ in us, no matter what else we're wearing.

This morning we'll baptize Chloe Lynn Kerr. She'll be wearing a white baptismal gown. In addition to her baptismal gown, when she's baptized, she'll be wearing Christ. ~~Saint Paul writes, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."~~ For the next several years her parents and Christian friends will have a lot to do with teaching her and training her what it means to be clothed with Christ. ^{They will clothe her... but when she gets old enough she will begin to decide...}

People who don't practice infant baptism often ask me, "Don't you believe that baptized children must make a conscious decision for Jesus Christ?" Yes, I do. Chloe will need to make a decision every morning of her life as she grows up. At every stage of her life she'll need to make a decision to trust in Jesus. There ought never to be a time in her life when she doesn't consider herself a believer in Jesus. The same is true for all of us. Just like when we make a decision every morning about what to wear. Every morning we must "decide"; we must "accept" Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. We must put on the Lord Jesus Christ and be clothed in Christ. When we clothe ourselves with Christ we put on his compassion and kindness. We take on his character. We begin to think like him, act like him, treat other people the way he treated people, including his enemies. We begin to desire the things he desired, especially that all of us come to know and love God.

Let us pray:

On behalf of the session, I present Clo-ee Lynn, daughter of Ed and Stacey Kerr, to receive the sacrament of Baptism.