

**Sermon, Fourth Sunday in
Easter (Year C)
“Who Are These, Clothed in
White?”**

I have always told you straight up that I am not the world's best preacher. But I do try to be honest with you. So, I have to admit today, honestly, that I am on thin ice with this Bible text from the Book of Revelation. It is a Bible lesson about clothing.

I am out of my comfort zone preaching about clothing. No one has ever accused me of being a fashion kind of guy, a well-dressed, preppy, pretty boy, stylish and all.

My preferred look is cowboy boots and Hawaiian shirts, so you know I'm on shaky ground here, preaching about fashion. Some men shop at stores that have initials, H&M, J. Peterman. My four initials? KARM. Especially the KARM store in Lenoir City. Whenever a fat guy dies in Tellico Village, there's always a good selection of nice sports coats at that KARM.

My wife, now she knows fashion.
Always dressed neat as a pin.
Opposites attract. And she
married me...She sees beyond my
lack of style, which proves I am
truly her trophy husband, her arm
candy.

I was telling some church
members in a meeting recently,
that the one thing I enjoyed about
working during covid was that all
our meetings were done over the
computer. I could come to the
office wearing jeans and a t-shirt.
They looked at me and said,
“That’s how you always dress.”

So, yes, I honestly admit that there
are only so many ways to disguise
my lack of taste. My fashion
sense is based on what doesn’t
itch.

I believe boots go with shorts and
camouflage goes with anything.
So, I am on shaky ground
preaching about fashion this
morning.

Sunday morning traditional
worship service, is easy for me. I
wear a big white robe at the first

service. A couple of weeks ago, someone who only attends the first service forgot to change her clock with the time change, so she went to the late service, where I do not wear this robe. She said, “Oh, pastor, I didn’t recognize you without your clothes on.” I hope she was talking about the robe.

The Bible reading from Revelation today gives us a vision of heaven. Most of what we know about heaven comes from the book of Revelation. In heaven, the Lamb of God, Jesus, is dressed in a big white robe surrounded by more dressed in white robes. “Who are those robed in white?” That is the question asked here.

There are several passages in the Bible concerning clothing.

Clothing. At the very beginning, the Bible says, at first we were naked--naked, ashamed and afraid. The Bible contends that Adam and Eve made clothes from leaves in an attempt to deal with their nakedness. Then God became a tailor and made them clothes from animal skins. (Genesis 3:7, 21)

Their protective clothing, made for them by God, was a sign of God's care and grace, even after the Fall.

Clothing. You well remember the story of Joseph and his amazing famous technicolor coat. That coat almost brought poor Joseph to ruin. That coat, sign of his father's favor, was also that coat, sign of his brothers' resentment.

Clothing. In the New Testament, Jesus criticized a rich man who was dressed in "purple and fine linen." (Luke 16:19) The book of First Peter criticizes women who come to church dressed in fine jewelry and beautiful clothing. (3:3)

Clothing. The Bible speaks of the clothing of Jesus as having power. A suffering woman merely touched the hem of his garment and, instantly, she was healed. (Luke 8:42-28)

Clothing. In the book of Acts, when the sick touched the apostles' clothes, they were healed.

Clothing. When the prodigal son returns home, there is a wardrobe change, the best clothing. (Luke 15:21) “Bring him a new robe, a ring, shoes.”

All this Bible talk about clothing raises the question, “What does clothing mean for us?” Our clothing is not merely a covering, a utilitarian necessity. Clothing has to do with our reality, our status and our personality. Put different clothes on a person and it is as if that person changes.

My clothing not only expresses who I am, but it also forms who I am. I wear a clergy collar in the contemporary worship service and at weddings, funerals, important community meetings. And if I’m trying to get out of jury duty, which did not work...

A member of our congregation who is a physician once told me that one reason she wore the white uniform and the mask and the rubber gloves was not only for hygiene, but also for encouragement. She said, “If I’m going into surgery to actually cut

on another human being's body, I need to be a doctor, even when I don't feel like it. When I put on all this stuff, I'm a doctor, no matter how I feel about it"

The doctor wears white. The judge wears black. The bride is clothed in white. Maybe your grandma wore her black mourning dress after your grandpa died. You would see her in that dress and know she was in mourning.

Clothing. In the Bible there is a beautiful poetic passage when the Apostle Paul writes, "As many of you as were baptized in Christ, you have clothed yourselves with Christ. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ." (Galatians 3:27; Romans 13:14)

It could be said the essential characteristic of the Christian is one who changes clothes. Who puts on Christ as if putting on a coat. In clothing and reclothing, there is a new consciousness, a new self-awareness.

In the Middle Ages, the mystic German Benedictine nun Gertrude

the Great of Helfta prayed: “Ah, Jesus, make me clothe myself with you so that I may be able to live according to your will.” Let me clothe myself with you.

We are naked, frail creatures, says the Bible. We are not so much physically naked and frail as we are spiritually naked and frail. We are called upon to fill roles that are too big for us. To grow into the name of Christian, to mature in our faith, to develop our ability to love God, love others, serve.

Ulrich Zwingli, the Swiss reformer and theologian, noted that when a young novice joined a monastery in the Middle Ages, he was given a big brown, scratchy monk’s robe. All of the monk’s robes were made in one size, a large size. A young man, wearing the large robe of an adult monk, looked rather ridiculous. Yet, given time, over the years, the young man would grow into his robe. One day, it would fit him perfectly.

In the same way, Zwingli said, when we are baptized, we are clothed in the big name,

“Christian.” It may seem ridiculous, placing such an important large name on someone, particularly upon the head of a little baby. Yet, given time, by the grace of God, we grow into the name Christian. One day, it will fit us perfectly. We shall be as we profess, as we clothe ourselves in Christ.

Clothing. Today’s Scripture reading from Revelation speaks of our hopes that our clothing will be washed in the blood of the Lamb. That is some strange language, isn’t it? Usually, we want to remove blood from our clothes by washing, but to wash in blood?

Here’s the situation and it is a bad one. Our clothes are soiled. Soiled by all the wrong we have done. Dirtied by all the wrong done to us. Our clothes need to be washed.

We do not have to worry about what to wear, anxious about whether or not we are properly dressed for each occasion. The same God, who made for our ancestors clothes to cover their

nakedness, the same God shall wash our clothes. Wash them white as snow. We shall be clothed, not by our own coverings, but by the gracious covering of the Lamb.

Question: Who are these dressed in white?

Answer: It's us! That's us around the throne of heaven!

Clothing. Yes, clothing plays a prominent role in the Bible and in our daily lives. Our clothes reveal much about us, our needs, our hopes. The Book of Revelation promises a gracious re-clothing, in which we shall be clothed, not by our own efforts, but by the Lamb, the Lamb who sits upon the throne of heaven.

You have to know your destination. Our destination is heaven, where we exchange our worn out, dirty earthly garments for clean white robes

So today, we are all dressed up in our Sunday best and we have come to church. We are all dressed up, not, we hope, in

dishonesty about our true selves, but rather in the hope that we might grow into the vision God has for us, that we might be more than our present selves.

We ask God to dress us in love and clothe us in grace.

In life, we feel frail, vulnerable, exposed to pain, threatened with all the difficulties of life. We seek to be clothed. Clothed with the power from on high.

Let us pray: Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, wash us and we shall be clean. Take our soiled clothing. Make us ready to live with you, not just on this day, but for all eternity. Dress us in your love, O Lord, dress us in your love. Amen.