

### **Do you know what church clothes are?**

Not growing up in the church I didn't learn about those  
until I became a pastor out in rural Statham GA  
outside of Athens, my first church during seminary.  
People there especially kids had different clothes  
for church and for the rest of their lives.

Maybe you did too?

Sometimes there were also school clothes that  
had to be kept separate from play or everyday clothes,  
but even that got a little fuzzy.

But church clothes were distinct.

And once in a while if you were going to some  
fancy gathering of some sort, then you were told  
to wear your church clothes.

The funny thing about church clothes is that  
they were more than just clothes. Right?

Yes, they were nicer looking and worn less often.

But you probably knew even as a fairly young child  
that when mom or dad told you to wear church clothes,  
they were asking for more than just what you put on my body.  
"Church clothes" didn't just look a certain way,  
they were worn a certain way.

She was asking you to put on your church attitude.

He was drawing attention to the fact that certain  
things were expected of you in this outfit.

And I don't just mean to keep it clean.

Or maybe I do mean that.

Keep it clean in thought and word and attitude.

Keep it clean in how we treat one another.

Keep it clean in what we say about people behind their backs.

Keep it clean.

Are you wearing your church clothes everyday especially right now?

Church clothes are the baby that got thrown out  
with the bathwater, I'm afraid over time.

When we went away from church clothes,  
because God doesn't care what we wear,  
did we go away from church attitudes?

There have been several times at different functions

like funerals and weddings that I have heard someone say  
I don't own a suit or this is the nicest thing I have.  
I remember hearing a choir director tell her choir kids  
to wear church clothes to a concert  
and then she had to describe church clothes.  
Those young folks had never even heard the phrase, "church clothes."

And of course, God doesn't care what we wear  
**but God does care how we clothe our souls.**  
And church clothes maybe helped us to see that  
what we do when we come to church  
is not like every other facet of our life.  
That we are coming into the holy space and place of God.  
And that our attitude and actions reflect  
upon God and each of us as a follower of Jesus  
not only here but everywhere.  
But maybe just maybe it is a good thing that we  
don't have church clothes anymore.

At least, it is a good thing if we got rid of them  
because we believe that we should be in our  
church clothes all the time not just on Sunday morning.  
I'm pretty sure that Jesus didn't want us to  
compartmentalize our lives into church and non-church.  
I'm pretty sure that Jesus wants us to live every day  
as though we were in the presence of God - because we are.  
And that we live every day as though we are  
loving our neighbor as ourselves - because we are.

Yet we need reminders.

**We need to take a moment and take off the clothes of this world with all the expectations  
that go with that outfit and put on our Christ clothes again.**

This process of reminding,  
of taking the time to reset our thinking  
and acting is the answer to the question:  
"Why do people need the church?"  
How do people need the church?  
How can I be the church in this world?

Matthew is the only gospel writer  
who uses the word, "church."

And it appears in only two passages—  
here and in chapter 16 in our previous weeks  
**where he tells Peter that he will be the foundation of the church.**

That means it is pretty significant that  
the word appears, and we ought to pay attention.

On the other hand, the word “church” appears  
seventy-two times in the epistles and  
in Revelation and in the Book of Acts.

That means that Paul and the other letter writers  
are very concerned with helping us  
be the church that we are called to be.

So, what is one of the signs of how to be the church?

**15 “If your brother or sister sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If you are listened to, you have regained that one.**

Here in the Gospel, it is the function of the church  
to be a force for reconciliation.

You could argue that, from a gospel perspective,  
it is the only function of the church.

We are in the business of putting things together,  
of healing the breaches between people,  
of overcoming that which keeps us apart.

It is about making sure that no one feels like an outsider.

And that everyone is seen and heard  
even when we don’t agree.

“Wait a minute”, you might say,  
“there is a call to ‘outsider-ness’ in this passage.”

We have been taught to believe that we are  
to give reconciliation our best shot, to be sure,  
but that if it doesn’t work,  
then we can boot folks out.

That is what verse 17 is saying, isn’t it? Is it?

**17 If that person refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church, and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a gentile and a tax collector.**

Verse 17 says that if the one who has caused  
the offense refuses to be reconciled,  
then treat the person “as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

“Yes!” we say, “toss them out.”

Except, wait a minute, how did Jesus treat tax collectors?

He put one on his team.

How did Jesus treat Gentiles?

He preached to them; he invited them.

Yes, there was an incident or two where he seems

to be a bit harsh to a Gentile,

but then after a reminder, he turns and welcomes them.

In other words, I don't think these words

give permission to cut anyone off.

Instead, we treat them, the sinners,

the breakers of the covenant,

the enemies with love and invitation.

We are always, always trying to heal what is broken.

And our nation is broken.

We have seen that played out in all of the

1<sup>st</sup> amendment discussions and debates

going on this week through the firings and Jimmy Kimmel.

How do we respond in our church clothes?

Well maybe as good earthly citizens we learn more

about what that amendment does say

and how courts have interpreted it before we remark.

I've heard all kinds things from both sides off base this week.

I asked this question on Wed night...

Could I as a pastor post anything I want?

Now if my church clothes are on should I?

And in our church clothes we continue to seek how

we can bring people together not further apart.

Which is at least some of the reasoning beyond of all this.

Too soon. Too much. Too something.

We might have to change tactics in dealing

with those who refuse to be a part of the community.

Jesus treated those inside the community

much differently from those outside.

And in fact, he was worse with those inside!

Worse, as in harder on;

worse as in having higher expectations;

worse as in being ready to call them

out and point out their failings.  
The outsider was encouraged and invited,  
challenged to be sure, but with love and gentleness.  
The insider?  
Jesus didn't have any trouble telling them what he thought.  
Much like we don't have any trouble giving  
others around us a piece of our mind.

**Yesterday I saw a post by Van Jones**  
**a CNN political commentator**

who is a self-avowed liberal to whom Charlie Kirk  
sent an unexpected final message.  
They had been sparring over several things  
and then denouncing each other back and forth.  
"Kirk's pushback sparked an online torrent of racist  
death threats against me, the likes of which I have rarely seen.  
Things were seriously heading off the rails.  
And then to Van's surprise in the middle of their spat.  
Kirk sends this message.  
Hey Van, I mean it, I'd love to have you on my show  
to have a respectful conversation about crime and race.  
I would be a gentleman as I know you would be as well.  
We can disagree about the issues agreeably.  
Van said I've taken issue with many of Kirk's words  
sometimes strongly but never his right to speak them.  
And then Van wrote this When our public disputes  
started going sideways, what Kirk's response?  
He pushed for more civility not more venom.  
For all our differences neither Charlie nor I  
ever wanted to see the other person harmed or silenced.

So, when Jesus says to treat the other like outsiders,  
he wasn't saying to turn your back on them or treat them as enemies.  
He was telling us to change tactics.

**16 But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word**  
**may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.**

And all along, he was saying we ought to be doing this together.  
This reconciliation thing is a team effort,  
not an individual exercise.

It is what we are about.  
Wait a minute.  
Is the function of the church reconciliation?  
Or is the function of the church to worship God?  
Yes. For sure. And no, I don't mean that  
we really have two functions.  
There is only one.  
It is in our reconciling that we worship God.  
It is in our worship of God that we are  
healing brokenness, we are putting people back together  
with God and with one another.  
It was so important that it was Jesus last prayer  
for his disciples and all people.  
That they all may be one.

The invitation to our Communion liturgy says,  
**"Christ invites to his table all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another"?**

**Loving Christ** (worship) –  
**repenting of sin** (reconciling with God)  
and **living in peace** (reconciling with one another)  
are all part of the same thing - worship and reconciliation.  
And we are to live this worship/reconciliation  
outwardly, in an invitational way.  
The church is a reminder to the world that  
we are all in need of a savior.  
And the church is the evidence that living in  
the "being saved" community is a more holistic,  
more reconciling, more joyous way to live.

Why do people need the church?  
Because we as a world forget  
to put on our church clothes.  
Or wait, maybe it isn't church clothes,  
but church dinner and what we are  
supposed to do when we come to the table.  
**In Exodus 12, you'll also see there is a verse that also references clothes,**  
but the rest of the verses are about eating.  
Or maybe not about eating, but about how  
we eat a special meal of remembrance.  
This text was all about the ritual practice

that came to be called Passover and these lessons  
are so that we understand what it is that we are doing, and why.

Underneath the specifics of this ritual is the calling  
to see our whole lives including our eating as beholden to God.  
We are called to see everything we do as an act of worship.  
How we dress in our church clothes and  
how we eat at the table are important to our faith.

There is another level as well.  
We are invited to participate in these rituals,  
to wear these clothes and eat in this way,  
not just to make sure we are aware of our  
impact on the world and those around us,  
not just to make sure we are aware of God's presence  
and call upon our lives in everything that we do,  
but we are also called to do these things  
so that others might see God through us.

**18 Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."**

We are active presenters,  
active signs of God's presence in the world.  
We commit ourselves again on this journey  
to presenting the goodness of God in the world around us.  
We do that best by how we care.  
We care for one another and seek reconciliation whenever possible.  
How we care for God's people everywhere  
by giving and helping and loving.  
By wearing our church clothes in all that we say or do.

**We are the sign that God is God**  
and God is still at work in the world.  
We are the sign that what we say about God  
shapes how we live in the world  
and how we treat those around us.  
Need a sign? Well here's your sign. We are the sign.