

Dressed for Action

Proper 14, Year C – Luke 12:32-40

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, August 11, 2013

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

A while back, I remember reading an article in some magazine about how the sales of Levi's jeans were in a slump because kids just don't buy them like they used to. It seems that the reason that Levi's has targeted so much advertising at young people is that they have found that those young people have the general impression that Levi's are the kind of jeans their *parents* wear – they're *old* people jeans. I remember sitting there in my relaxed-fit Wranglers thinking, "Hey, when did *this* happen?" I remember going down to Sears or to J.C. Penny's or – and I suppose this dates me a bit – down to Montgomery Ward's to buy a new pair of Levis. They were great. Remember? You'd buy them bluer than blue, and stiff as a board, and a few inches too long so you could get that rolled up cuff just right. Then *gradually* after hundreds of wearings and washings, they'd get soft and worn looking and fit just right. I look at the styles now: Jeans cut down to here for girls, *sagging* down to *here* for boys, with faded patches and wrinkle stripes and fraying and tears made right in, straight from the self – or better yet, straight from a *hanger*! Hey, what do kids today know anyway?

"Be dressed for action!" Jesus says in our Gospel lesson this morning. The lovely language of the old King James Version says, "Let your loins be girded." In ancient times in Palestine, a man wore long robes. As you might imagine, those got in the way of hard, hands-on work. Two thousand years ago, if you wanted to change the oil in your car, say, or sharpen the lawnmower blade, instead of putting on your Levi's or your relaxed-fit Wranglers, you would reach down and gather those robes up and tuck them under your girdle belt to free yourself to get the job done.

Today, if you work on cars you might wear some blue-grey coveralls, perhaps with your name over here – "Bob." If you're a broker or a lawyer or a banker, you'll wear a crisp light shirt, a tasteful tie if you're a guy, perhaps with a dark suit. If you're a college professor, it's a tweed jacket with khakis or maybe even jeans – even my son, the newly minted doctor of applied mathematics, trades in his usual basketball shorts when he steps in front of his class. If you work at Sureway or Applebee's or the bank (on Fridays) or any number of other places I could think of, it's a polo shirt with one logo or another. If you're a nurse it's scrubs. Firefighters have their turn-out gear. Police have their blues. Soldiers have their mottled camouflage. Put any of those things on and everyone knows what you're up to – you're ready for work. See them thus arrayed, and you know they're headed to get to work, and you know they're headed to do something important – maybe even to die protecting us.

"Be dressed for *action*!" says the Lord. "Let your loins be girded." Be ready for work.

Actually our Gospel reading this morning starts out not with that command, but with a glorious promise: "Fear not, little flock," Jesus says, "for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Now that's what I call the Gospel – the Good News. That's better than the seventy-percent-off sale on your favorite brand of jeans! The good news is that God wants nothing more and nothing less for us than that we should all inherit everything that is his.

The trouble is, we don't really see it most of the time. That's because, living and working where we do, we all suffer from a serious defect of *vision*. We call it sin, and because of that sin way back in Chapter 3 of everything, and every sin right down to a moment or so ago, we look out at the world with vision that is blurred, and clouded, and sometimes totally obscured, by our desire to see only what we *want* to see.

In the tremendous gift of the Kingdom of God, though, things are changed. Through the grace of Jesus Christ, we are enabled to see the world as *God* sees it – not for the limits and the distortion and the corruption that it *is*, but for the healing and the beauty and the wholeness that it *can* be. Living in the Kingdom, we are given the sight to see the hurt of the world – and want to do something to heal it. Living in the Kingdom, we are able to see the beauty of love – and are given the longing to embrace it. Living in the Kingdom, we are able to see our own shortcomings and failures – and we receive the power, *and the will*, to be made whole. And Jesus says that it is the Father’s pleasure to give us *all* that.

Interestingly, the one that *brought* the Kingdom of God to us, was first dressed for that work in swaddling clothes to keep the chill night air from his all too mortal flesh. The one who came to tell us about the Kingdom of God, dressed for that profound work not in the robes of a priest or a scribe or a learned teacher of the law, but in the seamless weave of a worker with his hands. The one whose work it was to show us what the Kingdom of God is all about, wrapped himself like a slave in a towel of service, and washed the feet of the ones that called *him* master. In the end, the one whose work was to be *in himself* the Kingdom of God, was stripped of his robes, spit upon, and nailed to the hard wood of the cross. He lived and died to bring us the Kingdom, dressed in the reality and the frailty and the *finality* of our own so-human flesh.

They laid him in a tomb, this bringer of the Kingdom, and they dressed him in the clothing of the dead. But when they came to see him, the only thing left, was that useless shroud. Those burial rags were of no use to the risen King of Glory! Seated on Heaven’s throne, Jesus Christ is dressed for action! His loins are girded up! He is ready for work!

What’s more, shrouds of death and destruction and decay are not for *any* of us who have been reborn into the Kingdom of God. The shrouds of fear and worry and doubt are not for *any* of us who are called to live and to work for the Kingdom of God. The shrouds of despair and denial and defeat are not for *any* of us who are heirs to the Kingdom that our Father so longingly desires for us. Instead, we are called to gird up our loins for the work we have been given to do, to love and serve our Lord, and one another. We are called to be dressed for action in the amazing and never-ending love of God.

I’ve told you before, and I want you to *always* know, what an honor and privilege it is to be invited as a priest to share in your life – in your good times *and* in your hard times. But God’s work isn’t confined to those of us who wear long white robes or basic black and backward collars. The work of Jesus Christ is out *there*, being done by *all* of us who have been baptized into his holy name, by *all* of us who have been given the Kingdom of God. Our Father takes *every one* of us, transforms *every one* of us, and calls *every one* of us right back into the world to be witnesses to what he has done and what he *is* doing in and through us.

“Don’t be afraid, little flock,” Jesus says, “the Kingdom *is* yours.” “Now, be dressed for action.” “Let your loins be girded.” “Be ready... for work.”