

Pentecost 22
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George was an angry young man. He had been angry since he was about twelve years old. Who knows why, something about George's home life struck him wrong. About the time George turned twelve he began to have violent arguments with his parents. His parents did not much like the type of friends he chose to bring home. So, George made a point of finding the most unlikely characters to pal around with to spite his parents. George accused his parents of being old fashioned, straight laced intent upon denying him his freedom. School counselors and parenting books referred to George as a "strong willing child." His parents felt frustrated that no one seemed able to help them cope with an unruly teenager who felt he was being increasingly stifled.

George fell behind in his school work. "Who needs algebra any way?" he muttered to himself. His parent's bribes, persuasions, threats only made George more determined not to do his school work. George was still living in his parent's home but he longed for the day when he could just be on his own. He wasted his high school years. His teachers found him belligerent and unwilling to try. Teachers gave up trying to help George after a while.

At times George did not even come home for dinner. When he arrived late in the evening, he refused to answer his parents questions about what he had been doing and with whom. As far as George was concerned, it was none of their business.

George did not graduate from high school. He dropped out even though he had no prospect of a job. A week later, George announced to his parents that he was moving out of his parent's home. Where was he going? He had an older friend who was willing to share his ratty apartment. George was confident that he could get a job and he just wanted to be free at last.

George's parents heard little from him after that. He never phoned home. He rarely came by the house except to collect some clothes or pick up a CD. His mother wanted to know if he was eating properly. That always caused an explosion of anger from George. George would gather his belongings and leave in a rage.

His father made some inquiries into what George was doing. He discovered that George worked some day jobs from time to time with a construction company. George had a poor record of showing up for a job and often lost his temper so he was asked to leave. His parents concluded that George was on his way to becoming a bum and they felt helpless to save their son.

After some months George's father found out where he was living. He phoned him one evening. George's tone was resentful that his father had tracked him down. "Dad I am doing just fine. Leave me alone." "George we have not heard from you in months. You have not been home and have not even called."

"So what?"

"George, do you know how hard this is on your mother?"

"I can't help it, Dad. I have to live my own life."

"Son, we are having a family get together on Thursday night. Won't you please come just for a little while? I'll try hard not to criticize you or say anything to upset you. George, it would mean so much to your mother."

"I don't know, Dad, maybe I will and maybe I won't."

That was the end of the conversation. George decided if he went home at all it would be for just a few minutes. Somehow he felt that honoring his father's request was relinquishing some of his freedom. No, he thought, I am not going. Then he thought maybe I should go and show the family I am doing just fine on my own. "I'll go and show them."

Thursday night rolled around. George was determined not to give an inch to meet his parent's expectations, he decided to wear some old dirty clothes. He had not shaved in over a week. On the way he bought a six pack of beer and drank most of the beer on the way over. As he walked up the front walk he stumbled a bit on the steps. George rehearsed the speech he planned to give as he walked in, "Well, here I am. I hope you are satisfied. I just want you to see I am doing just fine on my own. Save your energy and worry about yourselves not me." Then he planned to turn on his heels and leave.

George barged in without knocking. As he entered the front hall he found it covered in streamers and balloons. There was a large group of people in the

living room all talking, laughing and having a good time. His father was the first to notice him, "It's George." He rushed toward him all smiles until he saw what condition George was in. George's grandparents came out to greet him. Their faces fell when they saw his choice of clothes, his unshaven face and his bloodshot eyes. The house grew quiet.

"What the big deal?" George asked. "You wanted me home, here I am." George's father looked at him, "George, we wanted you to come be part of the celebration tonight. It is your grandparents' wedding anniversary and the day after tomorrow is your birthday. The party was to be for you too. We even invited some of your high school friends."

George stood frozen. Something inside him cracked. He looked at himself in the hall mirror and for the first time felt ashamed of himself. What was the battle really about? He could not remember. He wanted to join the others in the living room, but he couldn't. George was speechless. He turned and went out. Reaching his car his eyes filled with tears.

Jesus told a story about a king who prepared a wedding feast. On the day of the wedding guests were summoned. They declined for various reasons, most just too busy which in their day was an insult to the king. Some of the invited guests acted shamefully and suffered a just punishment. The king then invited others to the feast. When the king came in he found a man with no wedding garment. "Friend, how did you get in without a wedding garment?" He was speechless. The king had the man thrown out.

This parable is about the abuse of God's grace. The king who gives the feast expects the guests to come to the feast. When they refuse a second group is invited, just ordinary people off the street called on short notice. Surely they cannot be expected to rent a tux or bring a gift?

The guests do need do but one thing, come dressed ready to celebrate the occasion. All of us are invited to God's feast, called to be transformed, to in Paul's words put on the "garment of baptism."

What reasons do we have for not spending time with God? What excuses do we find not to come to the Lord's table to be reminded of God's gracious love for each one of us? If God were standing here today, what excuses would we be willing to speak out loud?

The most important part of this parable is the invitation. God invites us to be part of God's kingdom on this earth. God invites us into a relationship that promises deep satisfaction and fulfillment for our lives. All we have to do is accept the invitation. That is a decision we have to make. Will we put on the garment of our baptism and come to the feast or just toss the invitation aside because we have other things to do?