

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED

JOHN 19:23-24
DIVESTED

Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore among themselves, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be," that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says: "They divided My garments among them and for My clothing they cast lots." Therefore the soldiers did these things.

Likely you have heard the expression: "The clothes make the man." There's truth to that. If a bum is dressed up in a tuxedo, who would guess he's a bum? If a lady who does not possess Miss-America-looks dresses sharply and in good taste (I don't mean provocatively), she is attractive. I mean, do you feel differently about yourself when you go to Bismarck or Rapid City and have on your better outfit, rather than your worst? Of course. And the same is true in reverse. If a millionaire is dressed in rags, how much prestige does he get?

In our text for today, we see Jesus, like that same millionaire, "divested" of not just His clothing, but also His honor. Not only was He bound, bad-mouthed, assaulted, traded away for a murderer, but also divested. The word "divested" is related to the word "vestments." Clergymen wear vestments when conducting a service—black gown, white gown, stole around the shoulders matching the altar colors, perhaps a small brass cross on a cord—all depending on the man and the congregation. To be "divested" means to take the vestments off.

Already early that Friday morning, Jesus had been divested in cruelty and mockery. Pilate's soldiers scourged Jesus and put a purple robe around Him to mock Him. The Gospels say that when they finished they put His own clothes back on Him. He had been divested for physical wounding and for mockery, "Hail, King!" I remember one time my sister and I dressed up our dog in pajamas and took pictures. We had great laughs. I wonder if the dog understood we were making a fool of him? The soldiers made sport with Jesus.. Jesus was not just divested of His clothes, but also of His honor.

Soon enough that same morning, He was again divested of His garments. Perhaps we should use a harsher word, "stripped" of His garments. I doubt the soldiers were gentle. Just as grasshoppers strip a field bare. or as strip mining strips all the top soil and plants from the ground, Jesus was forcibly stripped of his clothes, and nailed to the cross. We hope that Roman crucifiers at least allowed the criminals to retain a loin cloth around their middle but maybe not. How humiliating for our Lord and Savior--with or without a loin cloth. In the case of a newborn baby, there is no dishonor in wearing a birthday suit. In the case of an adult, it is not appropriate. God has built a sense of shame into us. We do not want people to see us for what we really are. Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves together in the Garden of Eden when God approached. They were ashamed of the sinners they had become.

There is another sense of the word divest. We use the word in a legal sense, when someone is "divested" of certain property or inheritance or position, because of behind the scenes illegal maneuvering or something. Jesus, divested of His clothing, was also divested of possessing His clothing. The soldiers parted His garments, a quarter share for each, and then cast lots, drew straws we might say, to see who would get the seamless tunic that Jesus wore. And all right before His eyes. He wasn't even dead yet. Perhaps we could compare it to the sadness a dear elderly relative feels when their home place goes up for auction. They cannot bear to attend.

Jesus was divested of His honor as well. How much respect is there for one pronounced a lawbreaker? One who is publicly punished for being a lawbreaker? one who endures a most cruel execution? No honor in that. Who would want even to look at Him, so shamed? The enemies did. They gloated in it. "If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross!" But for His followers, He must have been a hard sight to bear. Why is it hard to visit a nursing home, or a hospital? Because there a person comes face to face with loved ones and friends divested of their health, honor, independence, maybe also speech, appearance, etc. It's hard to see them like that. Do you suppose Jesus' followers cringed to see Him? Is a suffering, dying Jesus the kind of Lord you want to hear about? The prophet Isaiah says, *As a root out of dry ground, He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. (Isaiah 53: 2-3).* Our pride is ashamed of such a Jesus.

Was Jesus forced into this dishonor and divestment, was He cornered into it? No. He walked that road willingly. Why? Was it because He was looking for sympathy? Do you ever do that? suffer dishonor, or appear to suffer dishonor, so that others feel sorry for you? That's not why Jesus did it. Was it because He had a flair for the dramatic, and wanted to get attention for Himself? No. Was He trying to be a hero? Do you ever do that at your work or in your home? take on more than you should, so that you can shine like a hero and be doted on by others? That's not why Jesus did it. Jesus let Himself be divested and stripped of His clothes and His honor and dignity, because He loves you. He gave of Himself for you. He took the loss Himself. When someone does you wrong, if you forgive it, who pays? You do! You take the loss onto yourself. So it was with Jesus. The Lord takes the loss caused by your offenses. Because He loves you in spite of what you are.

Jesus was also divested by the Father. The Father forsook Him as He suffered on the cross. The Father took every blessing away from His Son. Even the sun stopped shining. Isn't it true that to be divested of every blessing from the Father is to suffer the pains and pangs of hell? In hell, the Lord grants nothing. Jesus was as humiliated as He could be when He hung on the cross, punished for the sins of the world by His own Father.

A bit of an aside here. Please do not confuse 1) the suffering of the pangs of hell for our sins on the cross 2) with, as we say in the creed, "*He descended into hell.*" The descent into hell after His death was not to suffer. His suffering and humiliation ended on the cross. "IT IS FINISHED," He said. His descent into hell took place after He was made alive again. I Peter 3:18-19 says, *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison.* His descent into hell took place after He was alive again/ A victory appearance in the courts of the enemy! The descent into hell, which we confess in the creed, was not part of His humiliation and suffering, but part of His victory!

Through Jesus and through the forgiveness He has won for you, you are now dressed! You have honor and glory dressed upon you. In Revelation 7 the angel tells John that those in white robes gathered about the throne, are those who *have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14)*. In Christ you have Righteousness. A white robe, or vestments, of purity and acceptance is yours before the Father because Jesus was "un-vested" for you.

This applies to our daily lives as well. In Ephesians Paul stresses that we have been saved by God's grace in Christ, saved by God's gift! *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9)*. Paul further shows how such salvation is reflected in our conduct. Speaking of the unbelievers, he says, *Being past feeling, [they] have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness (Ephesians 4:19)*; but to the believers he says, *You have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him. . . . Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. And be renewed in the spirit of your mind, andput on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4: 20-24)*. "Put off" and "put on" are the same words used for removing clothing and putting on clothing. Put off the Old Adam. Put on the New Man. Does clothing make the man? Then all of you, whether male or female, are really something! You are clothed in Christ, forgiven, pure, holy. Think of the sins of today . . . lack of patience, quick and hurtful words, interest only in your agenda and your day, a lie here and a bigger lie there, words of cursing and swearing. All of it is conduct that God hates and conduct that God wills to punish. But today again, turn to your Father and say, "I am sorry, Please forgive me for Jesus' sake." And for Jesus' sake He does! You are washed clean, you are dressed, you are vested in the rich robes of Christ's righteousness, because Christ was "divested" for you! Put off the old man, and put on the new man! Serve the Lord from the heart!

So be it! Amen.

Pastor Kanzenbach---