

“What Our Clothes Say About Us”

Acts 9:36-43; Revelation 7:9-17 *NRSV*

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New London UMC

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On Saturday you might have seen some coverage of the “run for the roses” and the different kinds of hats that were worn by the spectators at the Kentucky Derby, or even on people who just threw Derby parties but weren’t at the race itself. Because hats are still a “thing” at the Derby and with Derby aficionados. It is a tradition, or standard, that has been upheld for generations. If you were to show up without a hat, people would wonder why you bothered to come at all.

I realize you might find this hard to believe, but in some churches women still wear hats to church every week. And it is considered “normal” to do that. Obviously this has not been true here in New London for some time. But I am old enough to remember when women still wore hats to worship in the church I grew up in. As a little girl I even wore a hat at Easter – along with white cotton gloves! Because that was what was expected.

Now some fashion expectations may change but what remains the same is that our clothes still say something about us. Many of us grew up with the terms “wearing our Sunday best” or our “Sunday go to meeting clothes.” That meant putting on our spic and span, well pressed and polished, classiest outfit – because wouldn’t we want to look our best before God as we worship God? So people made an effort to look their best. . . . Granted that effort would sometimes go awry if it became more of a ‘competition’ between people trying to look better than each other – while forgetting that God still sees US as well as what we’re wearing. Oh, yes, God sees us when we’re envious of what someone else is wearing – or when we’re excessively prideful about our own appearance. This been true since Adam and Eve fashioned stunning fig leaf apparel in the Garden of Eden. God’s vision has always been clear when it comes to seeing the intent of our hearts – or the “why” behind what we do, say, and think; as well as the more obvious external expression of our fashion sense, or perhaps lack thereof – which is my bailiwick. God sees it all.

So when we read about the clothing that the disciple Dorcas fashioned for fellow widows in Joppa, and think about her work – her ministry of sewing and caring for these widows, what do we imagine God saw when Dorcas was making these clothes? Did God see someone who would routinely have been ignored or dismissed because she didn’t have much standing in her cultural setting as a widowed woman – so she understood what life was like for the other widows in her community? Dorcas could have felt marginalized and unable to do anything significant for the women around her, but instead she focused on what she knew how to do. I think Dorcas must have had a great deal of empathy and compassion, because she must have devoted a good deal of time to listening to each

woman talk about her life, while carefully taking note of the woman's garments – observing what had seen too much wear and tear, but that the woman could not afford to replace. Somehow Dorcas found a way to gather the resources she needed to help the widowed women of Joppa have respectable clothes so they could feel good about what they were wearing, and feel good about themselves. Each piece of clothing Dorcas made turned out to be a gift of love and respect. And when Dorcas gave each woman a new cloak or tunic, do you think they felt God's love wrap around them, or did they see the light of Christ shine through Dorcas to them?

After Dorcas died, what did God see in this gathering of mourning widows who came to pay tribute to all of Dorcas' good works and charity, her faithful devotion and caring service? Did God see past all the clothes they wore that Dorcas had made, to see inside these women's lives to how they were changed by the witness Dorcas had lived out among them? Did God feel the deep pain of their grief as they gathered around Dorcas' body to mourn her death and to remember the goodness of her life?

What did God see in the disciple Dorcas and the whole community of believers in Joppa, that God would grant Peter's prayer of intercession and restore Dorcas' life? Why did Dorcas get the miracle that everyone prays for when their heart is broken in grief? What about all the other saintly people who have died – and all the people who have mourned their deaths? How come the faith community in Joppa got to turn their mourning into dancing – while other congregations have had to continue grieving the deaths of their saints? What does God see that we can't see? That's what we want to know, isn't it?

Perhaps what we want to know can be found in the Revelation to John, in a vision that God shares of this great multitude of people robed in white, with palm branches in their hands, standing before God's throne and the Lamb, singing and shouting out praise to God and to the Lamb. Maybe if we could see this sea of worshippers more clearly, or if we could truly understand how sheltered and protected they must feel being at home around the throne of God, maybe then we wouldn't feel so jealous when we don't experience what the believers in Joppa did when Peter showed them that Dorcas was alive. Maybe we could just be happy for them. And maybe we could be happy for our loved ones, our saints, who have died are being cared for by the Lamb who is their shepherd. Maybe we could find peace and rest in the knowledge that our saints and loved ones will hunger and thirst no more, because they have already been led to the springs of the water of life, and God has already wiped away every tear from their eyes.

Maybe God looks at us when we are grieving and sees the time when every tear will be wiped away from our eyes, and how we will be rocking those white robes with palm branches in our hands. Maybe that's what God sees that we can't see. Amen.