

ADVENT 3, B – December 13, 2020
SCRIPTURES – Ps. 85; Is. 61:1-4, 8-11; 1 Thess. 5:16-24; John 1:19-28

May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. 1 Thess. 5:23-24

I've performed many weddings over the years. I've seen brides in beautiful, expensive gowns, and also in fairly ordinary and inexpensive dresses; and grooms in rented tuxes, as well as ordinary suits. But, I've never seen more unusual wedding attire than that which was worn by a couple who got married recently. It seems that, shortly before the wedding, the bride tested positive for Covid19. But, instead of postponing, the wedding went on as planned. The bride and groom wore blue hazmat suits, with masks and face shields completely covering their faces, and the priest who married them was in a bulky white hazmat suit with a huge hood and face mask that was bigger than a beekeeper's. They were scary. It looked like a wedding on the moon! Well, they'll certainly have interesting pictures and memories to share one day with their kids!



But, you know something? Marriage is a scary relationship to enter into, for it's a relationship in which you are completely opened up and revealed.

- Your spouse sees you at your best: made up, showered and shaved, hair trimmed and styled, well-dressed... and at your worst: with morning breath; without makeup and with bags under your eyes; when you're sick; when you're irritable and grouchy; when you're making a fool of yourself.
- Everything about you is opened up for your spouse to know: your family members and friends... your past... your future hopes and dreams.
- Your health and your bodily fitness... well, you can't hide any blemish, wrinkle, or roll from your spouse!
- Your habits... the things you like and don't like... the holiday customs and traditions you enjoy, and those you don't... all are known.

All of these things, and so much more, must be shared with your spouse. In a good marriage there are no secrets!

It is this relationship – the utter openness and intimate knowing of marriage – which God wants with you. In Is. 61 He says that He will raise up His people and give them **“a beautiful headdress [and] the garment of praise.”** He is speaking of wedding attire. Isaiah makes this clear when he praises God for covering him **“with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”** And, doesn't the incredible work of God that we will soon celebrate – His sending of His Son to us in our flesh; born naked and helpless, just like us – make clear how close a relationship

God wants with us? Openness and complete knowledge, the oneness of marriage: God wants this with you! You cannot be His and close yourself to Him.

And so, the apostle Paul writes: ***“Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely.”*** God wants to sanctify you; to make you completely His and completely holy.

This means that you must keep no part of your life from Him and untouched by Him. Your home life... your work... your recreation... your worship... these places and occasions may call for different dress; you may be with different people and be occupied with different things (although, right now they are overlapping for many of us). But, God would be with you in all of them. Want Him to be with you! Do not segregate Him from any part of your daily life by not speaking of Him, or by behaving as if He is not there!!

There is no time of your life that is to be untouched and unshaped by God; beginning from the womb. There, the Bible says, God was forming you very carefully and wonderfully (Ps. 139). When no one else could see you, and even your mother was not aware of you, God saw you and was already working in your life; working on your life! He wishes to remain doing so in every time of your life: from infancy through childhood and teen years to adulthood and your senior years. The point is: let Him do so! Bring before Him even the worst of times and events of your life; not just the bad things that happen to you but the bad, the wicked and sinful things, you do. You may hide from others, even those closest to you, sinful and hurtful things you have said and done. But God knows; and He wants to know. So, be honest with Him. Confess to Him your sins, the ways you live as if God does not matter but you matter most. Ask Him not only to forgive you in Christ but to change you, to sanctify you by His Holy Spirit! ***“He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it,”*** Holy Scripture promises (1 Th. 5:24).

Such openness with God can be scary. But, think of that groom who did not change the wedding date when he found out his fiancé had Covid19 but donned a hazmat suit and gladly married her. Right away she got to see clearly that, ***“For better, for worse; in sickness and in health”*** were more than just words to him! Well, God is far better than that good bridegroom. He is a ***“God of peace,”*** says St. Paul. He doesn't just want peace; He brings peace – “shalom” is the Hebrew word, indicating health and wholeness of the entire person: spirit, soul and body. Look at Jesus and you see the God of peace. He didn't come to us in a hazmat suit that kept Him from our disease and protected Him from our sins. The Son of God set aside His glory and came to us in our weakness to take us to Himself, with our sins and diseases and all that makes us unholy. ***“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me [and] has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.”*** These words of Isaiah 61 are about Jesus. He didn't seek out good people, those who were praised by others and so would bring honor to Him. He sought out weak and lowly sinners and brought the healing of God's forgiveness and love to them. So: do not be afraid to bring your own sins to Him. Be open and confess them. He bound them to His holy flesh and

died on a cross to cleanse them by His blood! But, don't only ask God to forgive you. Ask Him to change you, to make you into an **"oak of righteousness, the planting of the Lord"** (Is. 61); one who He makes new and strong, to now do His works.

And, what are those works? In a commentary I have on Isaiah, Reed Lessing, the author and a fellow pastor in the LCMS, commented upon what God said His people would do after He raised them up: **"They shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations."** He wrote:

"Devastations of many generations" is a fitting summary of human history. This is what sin does. Sinners victimize other sinners who then feel entitled to retaliate, hurting those who hurt them, seeking revenge. And this creates more victims and more retaliation. Every battle is a counterstrike. "They started it!" We live in a world of grievances and counter-grievances. Everyone has a long list of people who have hurt them. As the endless cycle of violence accelerates, everyone's fuse grows shorter. Explosions of anger happen on a regular basis." (Isaiah 56-66, p. 288)

God does not want it to be so with you! Forgive, as you have been forgiven. You are called to this in Christ, for **"the Spirit of the Lord God"** is upon you, also. When in your baptism Jesus married you to Himself as one flesh, He gave to you all that is His. The greatest of His gifts is His Holy Spirit.

Go forth into this world in the strength of the Holy Spirit, then, to show forth Jesus, your bridegroom! Listen to His words, that they might direct you; be comforted by His Gospel, that you might be continually renewed by His love and forgiveness. Let God by His Word define you, as John the Baptist did. And **"the God of peace himself [will] sanctify you completely, and your whole spirit and soul and body [will] be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it."** Praise be to His name! Amen.