

Galatians 3:27; Isaiah 61:10
Mary's Glorious Dress
Memorial Service of Mary Murray
February 25, 2016

Shortly after Mary died on Tuesday evening, her family was gathered around her bedside talking about Mary, and one of her relatives--I can't recall which one now--said that when they remembered her, they would remember her getting all dressed up and going to church. I remember that, too. I think the lively clothes, along with the lively personality, combined to make some of us a bit surprised when we heard that she was already 86 years old when she died.

But the thing that I thought was really neat about the clothes that she wore to church was that she had made some of them herself. Of course she downplayed the craftsmanship and value of the clothes that she had made for herself, and of course they were in reality both well-made and fit her style of dress perfectly.

There is another type of clothing that she had made--clothing that she had made for herself to wear. Of course she downplayed the craftsmanship and value of those clothes as well. I say "of course" because this time she was correct in doing so.

Throughout their lives, human beings stitch and sew and weave together their thoughts, their words, and their actions into an article of clothing that they hope will dazzle the other human beings around them.

Dazzling people--that can often be accomplished. Things that are something less than flawless--their flaws can be easily missed--especially if looking at something from a distance or looking at it quickly or looking at it while distracted by its bright colors. It's the reason people can't believe how lucky they are to get 3 T-shirts for \$10 at the tourist trap. Until the first time they wash the shirt and until the first time they put a little bit of stress on the stitching at the seams...

Similarly, dazzling people with the dress we have made with our thoughts, words, and actions--that can often be accomplished. Flaws are either overlooked or hidden pretty well underneath. People look and talk about the beauty, the glorious dress of our life--especially when compared with the drab, dirty clothing that others have made of their lives.

But there's someone else that we need to dazzle with the garment that we have been working at all our lives. That's God. Because at the end of our lives, he says that he is going to look at us and decide whether we are dressed properly to get into Heaven.

Jesus told a parable about the wedding feast of Heaven in which a man wanted to enter the feast. But it was found that instead of wearing the wedding clothes that were required--and even offered to the guests--he had chosen instead to wear his own, common clothing. That man was thrown out of heaven into outer darkness. (Matthew 22:1-14)

So what sort of clothes must we have, what sort of clothes did Mary need to have when she stood before God on Tuesday evening?

Jesus made it pretty clear when he said, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*" (Matthew 22:37) The repetition--"all...all...all" meant that there could be no accidents, no actions that didn't match up. Not one weave, not one word could go in the wrong direction. Not even one thread, not even a thought could be out of place.

Although Mary was wrong when she downplayed the craftsmanship of the actual clothes she made for herself, she was right in what she said about the craftsmanship of the moral clothes that she made for herself.

What did she say? Nearly every Sunday she was here at Peace, she said that those clothes were full of holes, flaws, and sin. She said something like "I have sinned against you in my thoughts, words, and actions" and she admitted that she deserved nothing but punishment. She admitted it now because she knew if she didn't, God, the toughest garment inspector ever, would point it out when she stood before him at the end of her life.

We can protest that her life surely didn't have as many flaws as the life/garment of others, and I think that very few would argue with us. But it's a pointless argument, as it ignores what God—and even Mary herself—said about her sin.

And, even more tragically, it ignores her glorious dress.

That glorious dress was actually given to her many years ago.

But, first we should talk about how it was made and by whom it was made. It was made by Jesus, her Savior. For the thirty-three years of his life, Jesus made that garment by weaving a perfect, seamless garment of righteousness—a life of loving the Lord his God with all his heart, soul, and mind. It was exactly the sort of clothing that one needs to be wearing in order to be allowed into Heaven—the sort of clothing that even dazzles God.

Then Jesus gave that garment to Mary when she was baptized. The Bible says, "*For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*" (Galatians 3:27)

What about our sins, the works that the Bible describes as "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6)? Jesus took them and wore them to the cross, where he suffered and died in order to pay for them. Revelation says that Jesus has "*washed us from our sins in his own blood*" (Revelation 1:5-King James Version).

So what did Mary look like, what was Mary wearing when she stood before God on Tuesday evening? The hymn we're going to sing at the end of the service says it well: "Jesus, your blood and righteousness my beauty are, my glorious dress." (Christian Worship: 376, verse 1)

Isaiah also says it well. And he may as well have been speaking for Mary (although I rather doubt Isaiah spoke with a southern drawl...)—because his words are a confession of joyous faith like she had: "*I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness...as a bride adorns herself with her jewels*" (Isaiah 61:10).

Mary did like to dress in her "Sunday best"—because she knew Jesus had already dressed her in his very best. Tuesday evening, as she stood before her Savior, there was only one thing missing. Tuesday evening, Jesus added that final thing to her beautiful, glorious, and eternal dress—a crown of life! Amen.