

Pentecost 19, Proper 23  
St. Paul's/Resurrección, Mount Vernon, WA

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## The Story

Tomorrow, October 12th, is Columbus Day, a federal holiday celebrated in the 19th century, but established as a Federal national holiday in 1937. It is the day that Christopher Columbus landed in the Bahamas in 1492, sparking an encounter of two worlds on a scale rarely seen in human history, and opening the door for extensive European exploration and colonization, notably the English, and the establishment of the English colonies along the East coast that eventually became the United States.

In Latin America the day is not called Columbus Day. It is called, "Día de la Raza," "Day of the Race." What race? The Mestizo race, the mixed blood of Spanish and Indigenous peoples that make up so much of Latin America. Very few people can claim blood free from this mixing, from the highest oligarchs to the most remote tribes-peoples. "La Raza" is a verbal emblem of Latin America's formative stories.

However one tells the story, it is a way of going back to one's roots, of telling again the stories that form our own self-image. They are never really all true in what I call the "camcorder" sense, as if you had been there with a camcorder to record what "really happened," but they are true in the mythic sense. They tell that slant on the events that supports how we see ourselves today. They justify the choices we make about how we treat one another, people who are different, and even the land on which we stand. They are true in all the ways that are significant for the people who tell them.

They are often patently false to others looking in. So, any time a mythic statement like October 12th comes around, there is a bit of a fight that happens. It's not just "whose version is right," but who the bad guys are and who the good guys are, and nobody likes being called the bad guy. We hang onto them so fiercely precisely because they define who we believe ourselves to be. The reasons we are so tempted to scapegoat people who tell other stories is because it challenges our self-image.

This is truer, perhaps, of communities of faith than other groups, because we deal in the currency of mythic truth. We tell stories that are supposed to reflect the way things really are or ought to be. Our stories are supposed to be grounded in the transcendent—that is, have divine authority behind them. But what if we are wrong? It is especially hard to challenge religious stories. Yet that is exactly what Jesus does in the Gospel lesson today.

He tells a parable, a story with a point, about a king throwing a wedding feast for his son. All the right people had been invited to the feast—and you're supposed to go. It's the king. Not going is a sign of disrespect, or even disloyalty; and yet, some people don't go. Already the expected narrative is unravelling. So, the king sends the servants out to round up anyone and everyone. To understand the end of the parable you have to assume that for each guest the king provides the proper garments. It doesn't matter who you are,

just pick up the duds and walk in the door. Even then, someone slips in through the kitchen window—and gets caught.

No king in his right mind in Jesus' day would actually do that, because society was rather strictly stratified—it was virtually a caste system. The people on top didn't tell the same stories as the people on the bottom, and being on top, their stories ruled. To invite people from the commoners to the wedding banquet is to risk hearing the "other stories." What is significant here is that this king actually does that.

The King, of course, is a metaphor for God. It's a clear statement that God doesn't care about caste systems, or rather that God does—enough to violate them. The point is this: God invites all kinds of people. Some people outright refuse to come. In Jesus' day, that would have been the Pharisees and others who refused to listen to him. Some people try to sneak in on their own terms. In Jesus' day that would have been the ones who wanted the miracles without the faith, the goodies without paying the price of discipleship. Neither is a response to grace. For the Pharisees, grace was earned by following the law as they interpreted it. For Jesus it is a loving surrender to God in Christ. Grace is a freely given gift. But it must be received, acknowledged, put on like a garment and lived. It is a lifelong commitment to living differently in the world—challenging the caste system so to speak, living as if God's reign has come, and hoping for the day it does.

Grace is free, but it's not cheap.

Today we baptize. Today we catch up with what God is already doing in the lives of Elijah and Ameena. We tell the story again about how God works in our lives, and we celebrate that story in the lives of these children. We offer it freely, because grace is free, but not cheaply, because it is demanding. In a moment we will reaffirm our own baptismal covenant with God as these two make the covenant their own. If you look through it, it reflects a rather demanding story. We speak of birth and bath, of death and resurrection, of setting aside the old and adopting the new. It is a wedding robe that takes time and effort to wear.

It begins with the Apostle's Creed. This is the most ancient known creed of the Church, probably formulated for moments like this when new members of the church were welcomed through baptism. It affirms our continuity with the Apostolic faith, and it sketches out the basics of the Christian story:

- We know God to be three in one,
- God creator,
- Jesus, God incarnate, redeemer through death and resurrection,
- And God Spirit, active in creation and redemption, and throughout our lives.

And then it asks us to affirm five promises. They require faithfulness in worship with the community, a dedication to a moral life, and a commitment to evangelism, service and social justice. We offer the robe to these children. We promise to walk with them as they learn what wearing it means in terms of their own life stories, and we are reaffirmed in our own wearing of it.

All are called: The love of God knows no boundaries.

Few are chosen: Not all will consent to wearing the robe.

God strengthen these two and us as we seek to be faithful members of the wedding party.