

IN THE MARGINS: Sunday Best and the Good Lord's Grace

By Tony Martin

Editor

When I was a little guy, Sundays were as much about wardrobe as they were about God. My mama, bless her heart, would dress me up like a miniature Southern gentleman. I'm talking about shiny shoes so bright they'd make the sun jealous, a starched shirt, and a bow tie so snappy it could've done a tap dance all on its own. If she'd had her way, she would've dressed me like Little Lord Fauntleroy, but Daddy did put some boundaries on her desire to move me into that "Isn't he darling?" realm.

Those shoes weren't just shiny; they were a hazard. Slipping and sliding across the church floor, I was a polished disaster waiting to happen. Sometimes she'd put a strip of masking tape on the soles to provide some traction. And that bow tie? It was invariably a plaid clip-on accessory. Those clips were like a lady would put in her hair to clamp it down along her face.

Back in those days, everyone dressed to the nines for church. It was like a fashion show where the runway was the church aisle, and the prize was the approving nods from the older folks. Men in suits sharp enough to cut through Sunday morning fog, women in hats grand enough to host their own ecosystem – it was a sight to behold.

But times, as they say, are a-changing. These days, you're as likely to see jeans and a t-shirt in the pews as you are a Sunday dress. Some folks say it's the decline of respect, but I suppose it's something else.

Over the years, I've learned something crucial: God's not up there with a scorecard tallying up our fashion choices. He's

not looking for the brightest shoes or the snappiest ties. No, sir. He's looking straight past the cotton and polyester, peering into our hearts.

It dawned on me, somewhere between those Sunday mornings of my shiny-shoed youth and the more casual Sundays of today, that what we wear to church matters far less than what we carry in our hearts. Scripture tells us the Lord looks at the heart – and last time I checked, it doesn't say anything about requiring a bow tie for entry into the kingdom of Heaven.

Don't get me wrong. I think there's something special about putting on your Sunday best, showing respect and honor in your own way. But I suppose the Lord's more concerned with what we're best at: loving our neighbors, offering a helping hand, and carrying kindness in our hearts.

So, whether you're in wingtips or flip-flops, a hat grand enough to need its own zip code, or just your trusty old baseball cap, remember this: It's not the outfit that counts in the grand scheme of things. It's the love, the compassion, and the kindness we wear on the inside that truly matters.

And who knows? Maybe up in Heaven, there's a place where all those shiny shoes and snappy bow ties are welcome, free of judgment, just basking in the glow of the good we've done down here, dressed in our Sunday best or our Tuesday regular.

Or maybe we'll wear robes. We'll see when we get there.

Talk soon!