

September 29, 2019  
Rev. Kerry Smith

Colossians 3:12-17      Blest be the Tie that Binds  
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Colossians 3:12-17

The Inclusive Bible

Because you are God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with heartfelt compassion, with kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive whatever grievances you have against one another – forgive in the same way God has forgiven you. Above all else, put on love, which binds the rest together and makes them perfect. Let Christ's peace reign in your heart since, as members of one body, you have been called to that peace. Dedicate yourselves to thankfulness. Let the Word of Christ, rich as it is, dwell in you. Instruct and admonish one another wisely. Sing gratefully to God from your hearts in psalms, hymns and songs of the Spirit. And whatever you do, whether in speech or in action, do it in the name of Jesus our Savior, giving thanks to God through Christ.

My mom and I have walked in the Komen 3-Day for many years. My mom has walked more years than I have! You walk 60 miles total, 20 miles a day for 3 days, to raise money for breast cancer. While my mom was training for that first walk, she went to a running store to get some new shoes. The person fitting her for the shoes asked her what they were for and my mom told them. The running store employee then told my mom words that would help her to see the world differently. The running store employee told my mom that she was an athlete. My mom had never thought of herself that way before.

It's like when the nurse puts that newborn baby in your hands for the first time, and you realize that you are a parent. Or when you stand before the church to join, and you realize that you are a follower of Christ. I was talking with a friend this week and we were talking about how we are called to forgive, not because we are nice people or from the south. We are called to forgive because of Christ.

We live and love and worship together, and we all continue to seek God's direction on how to live faithfully as Christians in this time and place. We know what God wants us to do. We are to battle injustice, to look out for the vulnerable - orphans, immigrants, widows, and those who endure bigotry and violence. We are to give sacrificially. You are a family of faith that loves each other, prays for one another, has grieved the loss of loved ones together and has worked side by side to transform our city and world with the love of Jesus. It is our greatest witness to the world.

In our scripture Paul is talking about how to act towards other people, how to behave as a Christian. We are to be people who embody compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, love, peace, and thanksgiving. When we do life in that way, we are people who know what life is actually about and seek to live into what it means to be God's chosen ones, holy and beloved. We create a community that lives in harmony governed by the peace of Christ.

It is so easy for us to feel fear instead of peace. Fear of changing, fear of not changing, fear of not having any new members, fear of having new members; fear of death and fear of the life to which you were called. Paul says clothe yourselves with heartfelt compassion, with kindness, humility gentleness and patience. Bear with one another, forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Forgive in the same way God has forgiven us. Put on love, which binds the rest together.

Paul is not talking about a specific article of clothing but of being clothed. Just as we don't walk out of our homes without clothes, we are called never to leave home without putting

on our love for each other and our love for our neighbor. We are to wrap ourselves in the new life that embodies the life and ministry of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

When I get dressed in the morning, I think about what I'm going to be doing that day. I think about who I'm going to see that day. Was I wearing that outfit the last time we met? I wonder what the weather is going to be like and I think about how cold or hot the room I'm going to be in is likely to be. It doesn't take more than a minute or two, but I think about all of those things every day, because whatever I decide to put on is going to be seen by every single person I encounter throughout the day. People I know and people I don't know will see it.

This is what Paul is telling the Colossians to do. Get dressed so that you look like a Christian. Every morning, wake up and choose to put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience. Above all else, put on love. If you chose to dress yourself with these clothes each day, that is what every person you interact with will see. They will see Christ in you.

When I want to get dressed in the morning, I have to get up out of my warm, comfy bed, gather the clothes I want to wear and put them on. It doesn't happen automatically. We don't know how to get dressed when we are born either. It's something we have to learn. We have to learn how to button our buttons, how to put our shirt on with the tag in back, how to tie our shoes.

In order to clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and above all, love, it takes more than just your strength and intentionality. It takes practice and it requires divine intervention. We have to wake up every day and ask for God's help that God may speak through us and in us.

Paul is clear these clothes are meant to be seen by everyone you meet. Just before our scripture that we read this morning, Paul said "what you have done is put aside your old self with its past deeds and put on a new self, one that grows in knowledge as it is formed anew in the image of its Creator. And in that image, there is no Greek or Hebrew, no Jew or Gentile, no barbarian or Scythian; no slave or citizen.. There is only Christ, who is all in all."

Sometimes our lives in Christ feel like life and love and everything is good, great, and life-giving and joyful. Other times, compassion, kindness, and forgiveness are more of a burden than life-altering possibilities.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes we do a loving thing not because it feels good but because love calls on us to do it.

I have a good friend who participates in a prison ministry called Kairos. The incarcerated men who go through Kairos are called men in white because they all have to wear white at that particular prison. When the volunteers go into the prison, they have intentionally been in months of training. They are going in with the expressed purpose of demonstrating Christ's love, so that the men in white might know that Jesus loves them. They know the men in white aren't perfect, and they go ready to be patient and listen intently. They aren't looking to get anything from them. It is all about showing the men in white abundant grace and love. They have spent so much time praying for the men in white that listening to them and loving them is easy. My friend says that the hard part is to treat everyone that she sees in the world as she would treat one of the men in white.

During closing prayer every night in the prison, my friend says she tries to consciously look around at the diverse group of people holding hands with one another. They probably don't agree on much, but they agree about their love for Jesus and their belief that God loves all people no matter what.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3937](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3937)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3937](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3937)

Every day a challenge will come. It may be a difficult person, a problem you don't know how to solve, a moment of fear, a great temptation. It might be our first instinct to go into fix-it mode and try to address the challenge on our own. Or we might give in to the temptation and have a short fuse with someone. But, the more we practice making God an active part of our everyday life, the more likely we are to start asking for God's help in those crucial moments of struggle. In those moments of difficulty, we have to cry out for God's help.

A wise pastor once said, "The longer I live, the more I respect gentleness and the less I respect swagger."<sup>3</sup> Imagine if people saw us talking openly and honestly with one another about our disagreements with such tenderness and respect and gentleness that they were left thinking about how much we love one another. As Christians we go against the culture in so many ways, we travel to far places on mission trips, we show up to homeless shelters and protest rallies, we practice faithfulness in our relationships, we cough up cash for the offering plate, and maybe we even put a fish-shaped ornament on the back of our car as a way to show that we are willing to be different for the sake of the faith we claim.<sup>4</sup>

In our world today, we need to practice gentleness with one another more than ever. Creating beauty instead of outrage and critiquing policies instead of people. Polarization does not have to become our new common language. We are called to create space for dialogue, to be curious, to listen to someone with whom we disagree. I want to invite you to use some phrases like, tell me more about that. I'm listening. I would love to learn from you. I care about how you feel and your perspective. I hadn't thought of it that way. Let me think about that for a bit before I respond.

We know the direction God wants us to go. It is the direction of community, of growing closer to people, of helping, of praise. Whatever we can do to point us back toward the God of love and forgiveness that we are trying to follow. We have to add our whole life, our loves, our passions, and our interests together with what God said God wants to be about.

When new life and love take hold at our center, when the Word of Christ dwells in us and our community, our life together is marked by enriching and wise conversation, grateful hearts, and by singing. Singing comes when we have had hard stories and bleak days and nights and through it all, we know in our minds, hearts and souls how to sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God. It is the tie that binds us. I want to invite us to sing Blest be the Tie that Binds in our hymnal as we give thanks to God. It is on pg. 557 in your hymnal.

<sup>3</sup> [https://relevantmagazine.com/culture/practicing-gentleness-in-the-age-of-outrage-copy-frank-j/?fbclid=IwAR1VI0rG35ULGv\\_6BzYaRM4PJcaldRG4xskYDs4nK3JURXfl\\_r7OlxYh5hQ](https://relevantmagazine.com/culture/practicing-gentleness-in-the-age-of-outrage-copy-frank-j/?fbclid=IwAR1VI0rG35ULGv_6BzYaRM4PJcaldRG4xskYDs4nK3JURXfl_r7OlxYh5hQ)

<sup>4</sup> [https://relevantmagazine.com/culture/practicing-gentleness-in-the-age-of-outrage-copy-frank-j/?fbclid=IwAR1VI0rG35ULGv\\_6BzYaRM4PJcaldRG4xskYDs4nK3JURXfl\\_r7OlxYh5hQ](https://relevantmagazine.com/culture/practicing-gentleness-in-the-age-of-outrage-copy-frank-j/?fbclid=IwAR1VI0rG35ULGv_6BzYaRM4PJcaldRG4xskYDs4nK3JURXfl_r7OlxYh5hQ)