

The First Sunday after Christmas, December 29, 2024

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminster, Massachusetts

Wearing Our New Clothes

Colossians 3:12–17

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:2

The Holy Spirit, speaking through St. Paul, says: **Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.** (vv 12–17)

I noticed you got some new clothes for Christmas. How’s that sweater fit? Those pants? That dress? Maybe you’re not sure about the basil green color. Maybe it’s a bit snug after all those cookies we’ve been eating. Maybe the cabled design or vee-neck just isn’t you. Maybe you already snagged it or spilled eggnog on it. Those things happen. Enjoy the new clothes anyway! I hope they’ll serve you well until you wear them out, grow tired of them, or replace them with the latest style.

But those aren’t the new clothes I’m talking about. I mean the new clothes that St. Paul talks about in Colossians. They were given to you in your Baptism. It’s the part where he tells us to “put on” what we’ve been given. To own and wear what now belongs to us. He says it twice in six verses: “Put on.” Those words have “Christmas gift” written all over them. Paul hands us what we need to dress and clothe ourselves. It’s as if he’s saying: “Wear this, dear friends.” There’s an echo of a parable somewhere in here: Remember the king who invites everyone to the wedding feast and gives them all white robes to wear? Only one guy thinks his own rags are good enough and that he don’t need nothin’ from the king, so he trots in wearing what he’s already got on and promptly gets thrown out. I mean, way out—into the outer darkness out.

So, yeah, Paul, we'll take these clothes. Thank you!

First, let's think about who they're for and where they come from. The tag tells us. They're for "God's chosen ones, holy and beloved." You can already guess who they're from. It's not Santa Claus. There's only One who dares call you and me chosen, elect, holy, and beloved. And He really means it. We wouldn't dare say that about ourselves, would we? Not unless He said it about us first. What wonderful titles! Chosen. Holy. Beloved. That's what it says on your baptismal tag.

God's chosen. We could also say the elect of God. God has chosen you in Christ before the foundation of the world. He made that choice known in Holy Baptism. *In Christ* is key. This isn't like being chosen for a pickup basketball game. He didn't choose you because you're fast or can jump high or have a good three-point shot or whatever. Don't look at yourself to figure out why He chose you. It only makes sense when you look at Him. It's His love, His gracious favor freely given, the good pleasure of His will.

Holy. That's the result of His election. You are holy, cleansed, sanctified by the blood of the Lamb. Only forty days old, Jesus was presented in the temple as the firstborn. He wasn't really brought there to be redeemed or bought back. This time it was different. He came as the Redeemer. He would be the one to pay the price for all. To purchase and win us by His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. He earned our forgiveness. Now we have it by faith. For His sake, we are holy before God, without spot or blemish. No snags or egg nog on these clothes.

And, finally, beloved. For the sake of Jesus Christ, His beloved Son, the Father truly loves us. He's well pleased with us. His heart goes out to us. Loved—more than we deserve and way more than we know.

Second, as His chosen, holy, and beloved people, what has He given us to wear? It's quite a list: **compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience**. He wants to dress us up in an outfit that matches His. It's like when a father and a son get the same set of pajamas for Christmas. What He wears, He gives us to wear, too. And what clothes! These didn't come off the sale rack. They're not cheap knock-offs. They're the genuine articles. He would clothe us in virtues. People sometimes talk about dressing for the occasion or dressing for success. He's doing the same thing with us. Sweatshirts and leggings won't do. He's dressing us for eternity. What will work? Putting on an attitude of compassion and kindness toward those around us. Putting others before ourselves.

Bearing with one another and forgiving one another. That's a willingness to overlook the little things—and big things, too—the insults, the slights, the sideways looks, the thoughtless and insensitive comments. If we're really going to know each other and rub shoulders with each other—in church, in our homes, in daily life—forgiveness is an absolute necessity. And, honestly, we have all of us something which needs to be borne with, and this is a good reason why we should bear with others when we find them disagreeable.

And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Love. Love is why Jesus came—to Bethlehem, to Gethsemane, to Calvary's holy mountain. Love is what He delivers in the Word, in Holy Baptism, in this Supper of His body and blood. Love is what He gives to us and clothes us in. It's like the belt that holds everything together and keeps it in place. **Love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another** (John 13:35). In Romans, St. Paul echoes this saying of Jesus. He says: **"Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law"** (Romans 13:8, 9b–10).

It's all a description of the way things are for us now that Christ has entered in. **"Christ,"** Paul says, **"is all in all"** (Colossians 3:11).

And it's so beautiful when you see it. When Jesus prays for His persecutors while hanging on the cross, saying, **"Father, forgive them."** When He turns to the repentant thief, a man who deserved what he got, and gives him something undeserved: **"Today, you will be with Me in paradise."** Or when St. Paul responds to the Philippian jailer not by telling him off but by telling him about Jesus and the gift of baptism.

I'm sure you've seen it, too, in real life. Maybe not often, but sometimes. The mother who doesn't fly off the handle at her kid but bears with the little one firmly yet patiently. The husband devoted to his sick wife as he cares for her gently and tenderly even though she can't do anything for him in return. The wife of good humor who considers the needs of her husband even when he's been grumpy and insensitive. The friend who took time out of his busy life just to give you a call and check in.

I've hardly done it justice, I know. But it's beautiful, isn't it? Even just a glimpse here and there, the smallest hint of it is beautiful. Compassion like that, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience like that. This bearing with one another and, even when one has a complaint, forgiving each other because the Lord has forgiven you. It's so beautiful.

Yes! Yes, I want to wear this! I want to delight in these things, too. I want to put this on. I want to wear these virtues and live like this in my own life. Will it be work? I suppose it is, in a way, but we see lots of people sweat and struggle and work hard at things they want. A good athlete happily puts in hours at the gym. The best-selling novelist pours herself into her writing—and wrote a lot that landed in the trash can before she hit best seller. Is there any downside for us to actively pursue compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience toward others? Yes, we'll have to die to ourselves. But so what! We don't much like that part of ourselves anyway, do we? Compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience are your new Christmas clothes. Try them on! Wear them!

You might be thinking: "Pastor, I can't do it." "Sure, that's lovely, and I want to fit into it. I keep trying, but it's not the right fit for me. Something's wrong with me." So, what you're saying is that you're still trying to figure out how to wear your baptism? You're telling me that you haven't yet changed as much as you need to and want to? These new clothes don't feel natural and normal on you? Me too. I feel the same way.

But I plan to keep putting them on, to keep wearing them. I figure that I'll grow into them eventually. Or more likely they'll grow into me. I'll break them in over time. Or they'll break me in over time. We're like children. Sometimes we put the shoes on the wrong feet or we get the pants on backwards or we stick the arm through the wrong hole. Don't give up! We're growing up in Christ. We aren't yet what we will be. Or think of yourself like the child who puts on the superhero cape. He may only be four, but he's ready for great things. The more he wears it, the more he acts like the hero. And you have your Savior's cape around your neck.

I know all this about you, because St. Paul also says it: "**For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory**" (Col 3:4). Our Lord Jesus Christ put on our human flesh and weakness. He took the form of a servant. And now, baptized into Him, we put on Christ and His virtues. What He did has changed everything—including me and you.

Now there's hardly time to do justice to everything Paul says in this passage, but I want to point out just a couple more things. He urges that the peace of Christ would rule in our hearts and that we be thankful. Our new clothes fit better when we have God's peace and when we cultivate thankfulness. A good way to move into the New Year is to make a list of things you're thankful for—even little things. Make a list specific to the people in your life—your friend, your husband or wife, your children, your neighbor.

Let's not leave our new clothes in the drawer or hanging in the closet. **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly**, St. Paul says, **teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymn and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.** I'll go a little bit more into the singing part during Bible hour today. But the Word is so important. It's meant to dwell or keep house in us, not like a servant that we order around but as our master. We take our instructions and directions from the Word. It provides our nourishment and strength. And it is to dwell in us richly, not poorly, not in a way where it us little influence or bearing on our lives. If you were to make one resolution for the year, let it be this: To dwell in the Word richly. To read and study it at home, and to be here in church together every Sunday so that we can teach and encourage one another. You won't regret it.

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of our Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Because I'll tell you this: Whatever you do, in word or deed, you look stunning in that robe of Christ's righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. And it's not borrowed. It's given. It's yours to keep.

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:7
