

### **Colossians 3:12-17**

Christmas 1C + January 2, 2019  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho  
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Love and Peace

The Word of the Lord from Colossians 3:14 "And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." This is the Word of the Lord.

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

For better or for worse, the year 2019 has begun, and the arrival of a new year often leads to contemplation and resolutions. As to your personal intentions, I leave that to you; but St. Paul gives us good words as we look to the upcoming year and whatever the Lord has in mind for His people as we await His return in glory.

"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience." That's how our epistle begins. Put on these virtues, it says; don't just haul them out from time to time, but clothe yourselves in them. Wear them constantly and treat other people accordingly.

Clothe yourself in compassionate hearts and kindness. Where people are in need, do what you can to help. Don't do so out of pride or in such a way that broadcasts how much it inconveniences you, but do so tenderly (because someone is in need of help), and joyfully (because you are God's instrument to help them). At the same time, act as you can so that you do not burden others – but so that those who are in greater need receive the help that is necessary.

Clothe yourself in humility, meekness and patience. The world works by power, by striving to gain for yourself by being better than those around you; but you're not of the world anymore. Do not clothe yourself in pride which draws attention to your own achievements, however big or small; rather, put on humility which seeks to serve others for the sake of Jesus. Do not seek to use what authority God gives you in order to make people serve you – whether your office of authority be parent, teacher, pastor, supervisor, head of the household, etc.; rather clothe yourself in meekness that uses authority to serve. Be patient – clothe yourself in longsuffering. There will be plenty of people and situations which annoy you and inconvenience you, perhaps even hurt you: be patient, for the Lord is patient with you.

As you are clothed in these virtues, the text then instructs you: bear "with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, [forgive] each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." God's people are still plagued by sin in this world. Therefore, it is necessary that each of us bear with the faults of each other and forgive each other. This is patently obvious, and yet terribly difficult. There will be brothers and sisters in Christ whom you do not like so much; and when you encounter such people, it is easy to spot whatever weaknesses they have and target them: either to marginalize them, push them out or just make fun of them. This ought not be: you and I each have weaknesses and limitations; we have some talents and lack others. We each have sins which need to be addressed; but where it is simply a matter of personality, bear with one another. Where there is sin, clothe yourself in repentance if you are the sinner, and with forgiveness if you are the victim. And where you may still not get along with everybody, remember two things. First, each one is one for whom Christ died, and that means that the Lord places immense value upon them. Second, the Lord does not require you to like people you don't get along with ... but He does require you to love them.

This brings us to the third verse of the text, the summary of the first half: "And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." Clothe yourselves in love: wear it constantly. Not the gooey emotional stuff of romantic movies – that's not the love to which our text

speaks. Rather, this love is the totality of all the virtues listed in the previous verses, and more. It is all good thought, word and deed put together. It is the hard work of service toward other people. It is the bond of perfection, our text says; or, in the words of Romans 13:10, love is the fulfillment of the law.

If you are to clothe yourselves in love, then, you are daily and continually to clothe yourselves in fulfilling the law. You are daily to love God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind; and you are daily to love your neighbor as yourself.

That's beautiful clothing, and tough for sinners to wear. Thanks to that sinful nature, you are never clothed as you ought to be, because perfect obedience is beyond your ability. That is never an excuse to be unloving or to give up trying to obey: to do so is to enslave yourself to sin. The more you put on love, albeit imperfectly, the better off you will be; all the same, you will never love as you ought. That's why, as much as you need to hear this law, and as much as this law is beautiful and holy, you also need to hear our Lord's gospel. Your behavior won't save you. Christ will. That's why we rejoice that our text moves on to speak also of peace.

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body." When the angels sang praises to shepherds at Christmas, they sang "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." When Jesus appeared to the disciples after His resurrection, His first words to them were, "Peace to you." Sin causes strife. It makes enemies. You witness this in your dealings with other people all the time. But that is only a little reminder of a far more awful truth: because as long as you are sinful, you are naturally enemies with God. If you are to be at peace with God, then your sins must be taken away. That is what Jesus has come to do – to bring peace by taking away sin. The peace of God is nothing else than the forgiveness that Jesus brings.

So after instructing you to clothe yourselves in love – telling you that you ought to keep God's law, St. Paul quickly tells you to let the peace of God rule in your hearts. Be forgiven. Where you are not as merciful as you ought to be, Jesus Christ is merciful to you: He does not reward you according to your love, but according to His. Because He has died and risen for you, He mercifully forgives you all of your sins. Where you are not kind, He is the kindness of God who has saved you by the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit; in other words, because you cannot clothe yourself in kindness as you ought, Jesus has clothed you with Himself in Holy Baptism. Where you are neither humble or meek, Jesus has cloaked His power in meekness and humility, suffering God's judgment for His enemies in your place, dying your death so that you may live. And where you are not longsuffering, the Lord has suffered with your sin and still patiently grants you His grace today.

His grace gives you peace with God; and if you are peace with God, you are His beloved child. And if you are His beloved child, then every good gift of God belongs to you; which means He clothes you with compassion, kindness, patience and all the rest. (Keep your clothes on!)

As St. Paul points out, this determines the substance of our worship here, for all worship should be designed to bring to you the peace of God. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly," declares our text: we therefore speak the Word of Christ to you, for by it the Word made flesh dwells in you with all of His grace and favor. There are other words in the world that give wisdom and help and good advice, but it is only this Word that gives you peace with God. Likewise, we teach and admonish one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord. As you sing liturgy and hymns here, you sing God's Word to Him and to one another. There are many other songs that convey all sorts of knowledge and good feeling, but the music for worship is that which proclaims God's peace with you in Christ. Thus, whatever you do in Word and deed, you do it all in the name of Jesus. You do it as those on whom He has put His name as His people. In other words, you love because He first loved you. If you are forgiven, love will follow. If you are not forgiven, all is lost.

As this sermon draws to a conclusion, we dare not ignore today's Gospel lesson and its importance. Simeon is told by the Holy Spirit that he will see the Christ at the temple, and so he goes to find Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus. By the grace of God he believes that the Baby in his arms – that helpless, fragile infant – is his Savior. And so he sings his song which begins, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace – according to Thy Word." Simeon does not appeal to Jesus to save him because of his, Simeon's, love. Rather, Simeon prays that the Savior will act according to His Word – and thus bring peace between Simeon and God.

As long as the Lord preserves you here, you will come to the altar and receive the Lord's body and blood for the forgiveness of sins – the same flesh and blood that Simeon held in his arms, because the same Savior is present with you. Afterwards, you'll sing Simeon's song: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace – according to Thy Word." For, dear chosen ones of God, you live with this certain comfort that the Lord Jesus Christ comes to you with grace and life. He clothes you with Himself. He grants you His peace.

Indeed, the peace of the Lord be with you always, for you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen