

Whose Clothes are we Wearing?

Colossians 3:12-17

Visioning Sunday – 2017

October 8, 2017

This morning is our annual visioning Sunday when we look at where God has led us over the past year or so and where He is leading us in the new year ahead, and beyond. It's also the Sunday when we have our annual business meeting which will be taking place this morning during the Sunday school time in the Fellowship Hall. The Scripture I chose for this morning I actually chose at one of my retreat times away, alone with God, a couple of months back, Colossians 3:12-17. But anytime we choose a specific passage from a book in the Bible it's important that we try and understand the context in which it is found.

Colossians was a letter written by the Apostle Paul, and his young mentoree, or student, Timothy, to the early Christians living in the small city of Colossae. In Paul's letter to the early Christians in Rome, otherwise known as Romans which we have been looking at these past several weeks, Paul was writing to those living in that city saying that he wanted to come and visit them, something that he had not had the opportunity to do. We know that Colossians was written after Romans because he has now had the opportunity to visit Rome. And what happens to him when he gets there? The authorities put him in prison. Paul writes his letter known as Colossians while he is in prison in Rome. Actually Paul is probably speaking it and Timothy is serving as his scribe. The Christian church in Colossae is probably only about ten years old and already some bad things have started to creep in – first and foremost some have lost the focus on Jesus Christ and they have failed to appreciate their new identity as “believers in Christ.” Paul and Timothy are sending this letter to them to encourage them to press on to maturity in Christ by continuing their battle against sin, pursuing holiness & righteousness in Christ, and learning to live as Christians distinct or set-apart from the way that the rest of the world lives.

Perhaps the primary purpose of the letter now known as Colossians is best summed up in Colossians 1:10-12 (NIV) – the Bible verse on your bulletin:

We pray that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

At the end of Colossians 1 Paul lays out what is the primary purpose of ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ: “to make the Word of God fully known... that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Colossians 1:25,28). If we ministers are not doing those two things, then we are not doing what God has called us to do.

Then we get to Colossians 3:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:1-17 (NIV)

So, my primary question this morning is “What clothes (or more importantly), whose clothes are we wearing?” And I say we meaning all Christians in general who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and born again into the new life with Christ, and specifically those of us here at Oak Grove?

Is the clothing of Christ, described here in Colossians 3 – compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, love, peacefulness, and thankfulness – is that they type of clothing that describes us? Is that the type of clothing that describes me? What about the clothing that we were supposed to shed when we came to Christ – “sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed, anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language.”

I don't know about you, but from my view that type of clothing seems to describe much of the United States today. After the events of this past week and another mass shooting, this time in Las Vegas, I think it's time that we stop minimizing these events by saying, well that's just the results of one bad man, or that we live in a broken and hurting world. Which we do, but it is about a lot more than that. We don't just live in a slightly broken and hurting world that we are going to be able to fix by some magic pills or psycho-therapy, or counseling. That's like saying we're going to be able to fix or stop the mass shootings by more background checks, or eliminating those bump stops that enable the rounds to be fired so rapidly, or by arming more people. The truth is we don't live in just a broken and hurting world where there are easy fixes, we live in a downright evil and sinful world which is desperately in need of the Savior Jesus Christ. While going to far away places overseas on mission trips serve their purpose, our primary mission field is right here in the United States – just outside of those doors.

The key to our passage this morning is found in verse 16: *Let the word* [or the message] *of Christ dwell in you richly*. In *The Message* it reads, “Let the Word of Christ – the Message – have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives.” And in the Amplified Bible,

“Let the spoken word of Christ have its home within you [dwelling in your heart and mind – permeating every aspect of your being].”

Yes, our passage this morning says, “put on,” or “clothe yourselves,” and we do have an important role to play in it, but on our own we cannot put on or clothe ourselves with all those attributes listed in Colossians 3:12-17. We need Christ in our lives and we need the Holy Spirit. And the primary way it comes to us is through the spoken Word of Christ.

In my retreat/seminar class that I am taking in Chicago, known at the Transforming Community, the focus of this quarter has been on the spoken Word of Christ and how we read Scripture. If we’re reading the Bible for information than we’re not reading it for the right reasons. The main purpose of the Bible is to transform us. To transform us back into the people that God originally created us to be. We place ourselves before the Word of God to let God transform us, grow us, mature us, by the work of His grace.

In Jesus’ *Sermon on the Mount* he tells us not to be anxious:

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Matthew 6:25-33 (ESV)

There’s a very important teaching in that passage from Jesus that we often overlook:

²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ... ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you?

Who is it that clothes the lilies and causes them to grow? God! In fact Jesus tells us that the lilies neither toil nor spin, yet God clothes them and causes them to grow. Part of the problem today why there is so little spiritual growth among Christians is that we are so busy toiling and spinning, doing things that have nothing to do with Go.

Grace is not only the gift from God that causes us to repent of our own sinfulness and to put our faith in Jesus for salvation at the point of conversion. Grace is not only the gift from God which leads us home to eternal life some day in heaven. Grace is also the gift from God that clothes us with the clothing of Jesus and causes us to grow and be transformed into His image during our life in between.

But the only way God's gift of grace can grow us is if we stay planted in the right soil, conditions that are conducive to our growth – that is by staying connected to God through His Word – the written word found in the Bible and the living Word, Jesus Christ. A man by the name of E. Stanley Jones puts it like this:

“The plant grows by receptivity to earth and air and sun. It learns how to take, to receive. It keeps the channels of receptivity open, and the earth and the sun do the rest. This is the secret Jesus is teaching us through the lilies – “how they grow.” When we learn that, we have learned the most important lesson life has to teach us. Without that, life is a fight, [a fight to the end], a fight from your own center, a fight with your own resources, and a fight which ends in sheer exhaustion. With God's grace you fight the good fight of faith with Jesus as the center, with His resources, and the end is triumphant exhilaration.”

Or as Ruth Haley Barton, who leads the Transforming Community, puts it:

“In the end, this is the most hopeful thing any of us can say about spiritual growth and transformation: I cannot transform myself, or anyone else for that matter. The only thing I can do is to help create the conditions in which spiritual transformation can take place, those practices that keep me open and available to God [for Him to clothe me and grow me].”

As we look to the year ahead, may we realize that our primary mission field is not overseas, in some far away country, but it is right here in our own community, outside those doors, where we live, work and play, and may we place ourselves in positions for God to clothe us and to grow us into the mature Christians He wants us to be.

Communion Meditation –

The Good News is that for those of us who have repented of our own sinfulness and have put our faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, and for transformation, our clothing doesn't have to be perfect. It's Good News because during our life here on earth, our clothing will never be perfect. It will always be soiled somewhat. Fortunately because of our faith in Jesus God doesn't look at our clothing – he looks only at the clothing of the perfect, sinless, bridegroom Jesus Christ. It's his clothing and his clothing alone which gets us into heaven. And we get in only by the breaking of his body and the shedding of his blood on the cross.