

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Sunday after Christmas, December 30, 2018

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 465, 408:1-2, 395:1-5, 398, 644.

Lessons: Isaiah 45:20-25, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, Matthew 18:1-15.

Sermon Text: Colossians 3:12-17.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

As we are about to begin a new calendar year, we remember that God chose you. The Word of God in front of us today calls you ***“God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved.”*** Because you are dearly loved, show that love to others, especially ***“as members of one body”***; and as God's chosen ones, his beloved children, ***“clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”*** You are doing this – and should be doing it every day – not so much to honor and glorify you, but to show love for others – your fellow children of God.

Because the Holy Ghost has called you to be holy, has sanctified you, he calls you to

LOVE, ABOVE ALL

- 1. Clothe yourselves with all that Christ represents, and**
- 2. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.**

Doesn't it seem strange to start a sermon with a conclusion? That's what the word ***“therefore”*** suggests. So a few sentences about the contents of the letter to the Colossian Christians isn't out of place.

Paul addressed this letter ***“To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse.”*** Colossians 1:2 (NIV)

Then he has emphasized the greatness of Christ, pointing out what God has done through him, pleading with them to ***“continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.”*** Col. 1:23 (NIV)

He has pleaded with them to live in Christ, ***“rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”*** Col. 2:6-7 (NIV)

He assures them ***“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins.”*** Colossians 2:13 (NIV)

So because you have been ***“raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”*** Colossians 3:1-2 (NIV)

Now, as a sort of conclusion, although there are 26 verses remaining in this very personal letter, he gives the admonition to live as God's beloved children.

He writes ***“Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”*** Don't those words suggest getting dressed up as for a banquet? This is not the necklaces or the tie clasps, cufflinks and other bling. It is to clothe yourselves, to cover yourselves with compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Compassion is a deep feeling of affection rooted in the love of Christ. Kindness is broader than compassion. It can be shown to anyone. Humility is the virtue that leads Christians to seek to place themselves below others and to put the welfare of others before their own. Gentleness is not a “spinelessness that bows before every breeze or refuses to take a stand on any principle.” This refers to not being easily provoked to fits

of anger by the carelessness of others, and overlooking insults in the spirit of forgiveness. Patience includes not bearing a grudge.

And having prepared yourself, you are then to be patient and ***“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”***

Oh, that word ***“forgive”***! Don’t we pray for this every time we say the Lord’s Prayer? “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” As the Lord has forgiven you, you must forgive one another. And what does that mean? It doesn’t just mean saying the words “I forgive you”.

As humans we find it hard to forget when someone sins against us. But we are to forgive and to forget. The Lord does that in forgiving our sins. That is exactly how we are to forgive. But notice that it isn’t just the overt sins that others – even our brethren – commit against us. God says ***“forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another.”*** The word grievance refers to an “actual or supposed circumstance regarded as a just cause for complaint.” And we sometimes have grievances that are unfounded, that are even fabricated. We may just think that our way is the only way to do things, and so may have grievances against others. Yes, humanly speaking, there is often reason for our feeling the way we do against others. But God tells us to put away, to forgive all those things. Look at what the Lord does to all our sins. He looks at them differently, he covers them and washes them away. Isaiah tells us: ***“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”*** Isaiah 1:18 (NIV)

And oh, how hard it is to do that! Our sinful flesh always wants to get even, to get revenge, to be justified in its own actions and thoughts. But remember that we sin not only in deeds and words, but also in thought! And when we think of the lengths that God went to to forgive our sins – he gave the greatest sacrifice possible – we really want to ***“Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”***

But our daily preparation, our daily getting dressed as God’s children isn’t done yet. ***“And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”*** Love – for God, and for one another – is to be put on over all these characteristics he has just mentioned. Love, like a precious gown and new shoes or a new suit, shirt, and tie – all the new clothes that we think we look so good in – love is really a grand outfit! We can’t love by ourselves. Scripture tells us: ***“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”*** 1 John 4:11 (NIV) And ***“We love because he first loved us.”*** 1 John 4:19 (NIV)

But it doesn’t stop there, with just outer garments covering us like the love of God. He goes on ***“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.”***

So this isn’t just an outward appearance of love, or a veneer of love. It is from the inside out. You, the child of God, the Christian, are to be clothed from the heart and mind inside to the outside with characteristics that distinguish you as a Christian, not as one for whom the ways of the world are the most important thing.

Just as we are to be clothed with ***“compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience”*** and love, we are to ***“Let the peace of Christ rule in [our] hearts.”*** We must think of the word peace in connection with the gospel of Christmas: ***“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”*** Luke 2:14 (KJV) This, of course, is peace with God, knowing and being reassured that he is not angry with us because of our sins. He sent his Son to pay the price for all our sins.

Whether or not we realize it, that is a message that is missing from some churches. Listening to a funeral in another church I found no assurance that Jesus died for all my sins. Jesus himself tells us: ***“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*** John 14:27 (NIV) You have that peace from Christ, the peace that Christ gives you with the forgiveness of sins in your hearts. Let it show also in your lives! God is not angry with you because of your sins – why should you be angry or upset with one another?

We read another special reason to ***“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.”*** Scripture goes on: ***“since as members of one body you were called to peace.”*** Members of one body. Look at your own body. Your right hand doesn’t behave independently of your left hand. Your hand doesn’t fight with your foot. Your eye and your hand don’t operate independently of your heart and mind. They are all part of the same physical body.

You’ve been called by the Holy Ghost to be part of the body of Christ. Look at how the letter to the Ephesians speaks of building up the church, the body of Christ: ***“It was [God] who gave some to be apostles,***

some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” Eph. 4:11-16 (NIV)

You also heard in one of our lessons: *“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”* 1 Corinthians 12:27 (NIV)

Because you are part of the very body of Christ, his church, you are to **“be thankful.”** This isn’t just a one-day-a-year thankfulness. This is an every day thankfulness, thankful for earthly blessings, yes, but especially being thankful that God has given you every spiritual blessing – and you can even read of those blessings for yourself!

God even tells us: *“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.”* So you see that our entire life is a song, a hymn, a book of thankfulness to God!

Our text even tells us more of how this can happen: *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”* Where do we get our methods and ways to show our love to our fellow mankind, and especially to our fellow Christians? It comes from **“the word of Christ”**, not from earthly and unbelieving philosophers, teachers, writers, and advice columnists. The word of God – the Bible – is the source of all we need for our spiritual lives!

And specifically, we read about teaching and admonishing one another with all wisdom. The older we get, the more we are teaching – for good or for bad. We teach in words, yes, but also by actions. The world sees us and sometimes wonders ‘is that person really a Christian the way they are behaving?’ More importantly, and especially for eternal life, we must not cause offense, we must not cause anyone to sin. There are many things a Christian avoids and many things a Christian does to seek to avoid the danger of causing offense, of causing someone to sin because of our actions and words.

And if we see or think that our brother is sinning, what are we to do? *“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.”* Matthew 18:15 (NIV) When we see someone straying, we must go and talk to that person, even at the risk of what the world would call ‘friendship’. With the Word of God we will gently admonish, that is, tell someone they are doing wrong and seek to correct them.

Some churches have a custom of turning to people next to you and reaching out during a specific time of the service. Right now would be a good time to do that kind of thing, to let your Christian brother and sister know you care. I’m not going to pause the sermon to do that now, but take time before you leave the building to reach out and talk to one another!

And isn’t it interesting that Paul goes on right here about teaching and admonishing **“one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”** Think of the Psalms you may have memorized, of the Bible verses you may have memorized, of the hymns you have learned and love. He even mentions **“spiritual songs”**. Isn’t that interesting, because so many of the songs we hear daily are anything but spiritual!

And finally, God concludes this section with the words **“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.”** We also read in First Corinthians: **“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”** 1 Cor. 10:31 (NIV)

May God lead all our actions, all our words, and all our thoughts to do everything giving thanks to God!
Amen