



National Youth Sunday 2018

Bound Together: Clothed in Christ (Colossians 3:12-15)
Sermon and Scripture Reflections by Nathan Hollenberg

Colossians 3: 12-15

Scripture:

“As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with 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 the one body. And be thankful.” ~ NRSV

“So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It’s your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.

Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing, sing your hearts out to God! Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way.” ~ The Message

Reflection:

At the beginning of chapter 3 in Paul’s letter to the church in Colossae Paul claims that our life “is now hidden in Christ” (v. 3). It is a funny sounding and perhaps confusing claim but what I think Paul is trying to introduce is that there is nothing physiological that separates Christians from anyone else. Christians cannot be singled out through the use of an x-ray machine, a cardiograph, or any medical instrument. No physical or medical test will ever be able to predict whether or not someone is a follower of Christ. Therefore, Paul claims that our life is “hidden” in Christ.

However, by the time we get to our passage for National Youth Conference, Paul is inviting us to put on the garments that suit God’s chosen people. We are invited to dress in clothing that openly demonstrates what we are within; we are not meant to keep this life hidden away. As we read Paul’s invitation to be clothed in compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience a temptation is to think that Paul is simply calling us to imitate Christ. While Christ has



set us an example, the putting on of these holy garments is also about revealing the hidden reality of Christ within us; making something hidden visible.

Therefore, yes, we are called to follow the example of Jesus in showing compassion and kindness to one another, to be humble and patient, to offer forgiveness, and to lead a life of love. Yet if we rely on our own strength and our own ability to follow in Jesus' footsteps we will stumble for none of us are God. This is why Paul calls us to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, to recognize that Christ dwells and empowers us from within.

This is how we as Christians are empowered to show compassion and kindness in the midst of anger and selfishness. This is how we are empowered to offer a way of peace and forgiveness in the midst of violence and a desire to settle the score. This is how we are empowered to remain a community of faith even when we are in conflict or disagree with one another. The call of Paul is not just to follow in Jesus' footsteps but to recognize the God of compassion, kindness, forgiveness, and love that is living within each one.

Sermon Ideas:

1. One option is to have several youth give "mini" sermons on some of the clothing we have been invited to put on (compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, love.). If the youth are especially creative they could even dress in shirts with the words compassion, forgiveness, etc. written on them to correspond with their mini sermon. Have the youth reflect on what compassion, humility, forgiveness, etc. looks like in our world today.
2. Often when reading this passage, we view the call to be clothed in compassion, kindness, etc. as an individual faith mandate. While it is certainly important to self-reflect, it is also important for churches to consider how they collectively are called to put on the garments of Christ as a body of believers. Paul's words here are being addressed to a church so it is appropriate for congregations to consider how they are offering compassion, forgiveness, and love. Having the youth name the areas they see their church already putting on these garments of Christ can be uplifting and empowering for a church body to hear.
3. The Message adds an interesting line in its interpretation of the text: "be content with second place." It was a line that stood out to the National Youth Cabinet as we narrowed in on this passage as our theme scripture. We live in a "win at all cost" society and it seems that the garments we are being called to put on here are by in large counter cultural. Putting on the clothes suggested in this passage is not easy for our world that often chooses to dress in greed, hatred, and violence. Naming this tension between what Christ calls us to put on versus what the world offers can be challenging but important to wrestle with. There are also some powerful possibilities for props and visuals should a youth or youth group want to take this approach as they compare God's clothing to the worlds.