

## **Ninth Sunday after Pentecost**

August 11, 2019

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Farmington, New Mexico

**Colossians 3:12-17** Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. <sup>13</sup>Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup>And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

<sup>15</sup>Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>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. <sup>(NIV)</sup>

### **"Your Christian Identity"**

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Questioning your identity is easy. You aren't exactly like the rest of your family. You appreciate your heritage. You know where you came from. And yet, every time a major decision has to be made and you consult with your uncles and aunts and cousins, you start to realize how different you are. You just don't think the same way they do. You don't share their same view of the world that they do.

Living comfortably in your own identity is hard. I think that's why it's easy for us to escape into costumes. For one day or even for a few hours, you can control the way people see you. You can even wish this is the way it could be the rest of the time. This is the real me. The one who has to wear a uniform and look respectable is just the costume. This is who I really am.

Christians sometimes struggle with perceptions and identity. You want the people around you, especially the people whom you respect and love the most, to see you with the goodness and noble behavior and generous spirit that you wish you actually had on the inside. You want them to see you and remember you in your best and brightest moments, not keeping track of the disappointing and shameful things you have let slip. But what if they find out? What if the people you love figure out that your compassion and humility and kindness fit you about as comfortably as a three-piece suit or three-inch stiletto heels? What if they knew the way you were when no one else was around, that when patience gets put to the test and compassion becomes uncomfortable, you slip back into your normal spiritually comfy clothes the way you'd throw on slippers and sweats after a long day of work?

Is the Christian faith something you put on like that uniform and practical shoes you need when you go to work? Is it more like the comfy clothes you get to slip into at the end of a difficult day? You know the answer you want to give. But when you're honest, you can admit the impression you want to show people isn't exactly the same as the way

you feel about yourself inside. Let's be honest. Being a full-time Christian is hard. Colossians tells us of God's high expectations for Christians: **"clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."** (Colossians 3:12,13)

Maybe we should just be more honest about who we really are. When you realize that God expects you to **"bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another,"** does it just seem to challenging to be a full-time Christian (Colossians 3:13)? Doesn't it seem like putting up with other people's burdens and letting go of their complaints and criticisms are the kinds of things only superhero Christians are qualified to do? You would feel like a phony if you pretended to be something you are not. You would feel hypocritical if you gave the impression you could always show these virtues when you realize your severe spiritual limitations.

## 2

Colossians helps Christians find out identity in something deeper than our feelings, looking beyond past spiritual performance. Colossians was written to a group of Christians who were challenged in their faith. The people they grew up with were accusing them of turning their backs on their culture and heritage. Then new teachings popped up. Advocates claimed a more modern and enlightened way of looking at ourselves. Holding onto Christian beliefs was viewed as outdated and childish. These outside attacks conspired to rock the Colossian Christians from their sense of spiritual security.

To get an honest picture of our spiritual identity, it helps not just to think about how we view ourselves, but how God sees our identity. Have you gotten so caught up in your current struggles and your present failures that you have forgotten your true identity? The portion of Scripture for our meditation this morning begins: **"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved." (Colossians 3:12)** Before God tells his people what to do or how to do it, he reminds them of their identity tied to himself. Remember that **"God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth."** (2 Thessalonians 2:13) The Bible reminds us: **"the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."** (1 John 1:8) Because of Christ's life and work, each of us can know: **"Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."** (Ephesians 5:2)

This doesn't mean that God doesn't care about your failures. It doesn't mean God isn't concerned when you put on and take off Christian virtues of kindness and gentleness and compassion like you were trying on 6 different pairs of jeans in a department store dressing room. Colossians 3:13 tells us: **"Forgive as the Lord forgave you."** Your identity is tied to what the Lord has done for you. Do you always feel like a superhero Christian? Do you have untapped super powers somewhere deep inside? It doesn't matter. Jesus Christ is your hero. He heroically went to the cross to take on the spiritual forces and powers attacking your soul. He rose victoriously from the grave to defeat your soul's archrivals of death and the devil. When it comes to uncovering your true identity, focus less on how you feel about yourself and more on what God has done for you.

That's why the key to revealing your true identity comes from the love of Jesus Christ. Colossians 3:14 tells us: **"And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."** This is the love that Christ showed you when He lived for you, died for you, rose again for you. Christian love can only come from a heart that believes in what Jesus has done for you. This love of Jesus living inside of your heart isn't like some big, poofy overcoat that you use to hide some serious fashion faux-pas or embarrassing skin condition. This love of Jesus is the one essential element for living your Christian life. In other words, you can imagine yourself to be a Christian or pretend to do Christian things all you want. But only through the love of Jesus Christ can you be a Christian and live out a genuine Christian life.

## 1

Colossians chapter three also has an antidote to feeling like we have to put on a costume or pretend to be something we really aren't. Against all these attacks and efforts to push us off the spiritually secure pedestal of Christ's victory, God has a solution that works from the inside out. The Bible tells us the key solution for our struggles: **"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly."** (Colossians 3:16) The good news of Jesus Christ isn't just a house guest in a Christian's heart. God's word isn't a distant relative who pops by for a random, quick visit. The message of Jesus Christ takes up residence in Christian hearts. It fills every nook and cranny, every inch of real estate inside you.

It fills you, not just with spiritual information, but with the ability to put that news to good use. The encouragement continues: **"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom."** (Colossians 3:16) You can use the word of Christ on yourself. You can handle it and hand it out for others. You can educate and instruct with God's word.

One of the great and blessed ways that identity sticks with you is in your worship life. The Bible tells us: **"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."** (Colossians 3:16) Worship is an essential part of living out our Christian identity. Even the music of Christians expresses the saving message of Jesus Christ. We are free to add our own flavor to it, but worship in private or gathered with fellow Christians primarily serves to express what Christ Jesus has done for you, for those around us, for the entire world.

The word of Christ takes up residence in Christian hearts. But that word doesn't just kick back and relax. The word of Christ helps you live out your Christian identity in big and small ways. Colossians 3:15 tells us: **"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace."** The word of Christ brings the peace of Christ to Christian hearts. The peace of Christ isn't some truce, some peace treaty signed hundreds of years ago. The peace of Christ serves as an umpire in Christian hearts. Knowing that you are a redeemed child of God brings you joy of knowing your heavenly Father loves you and forgives you for the sake of Jesus Christ. Once this guilt and burden is erased from your soul, the word of Christ and the peace of Christ act like a referee to keep out any influence that would rob you of your identity. Anything that would drown you in doubt, any concept causing confusion about your spiritual identity is out, overruled by the peace of Christ.

Ultimately that word of Christ that brings spiritual peace takes root in Christian hearts. It becomes a part of you, inseparable from who you are. That's why the Bible 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."** (Colossians 3:17) Ultimately, every moment of a Christian's life reflects that gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. Every action expresses gratitude for Christ's sacrifice. There is no fear or shame of who you are. There is only pride and joy in what Christ has done for you and the status He has given you.

**Conclusion:** Teachers will put in lots of hours with students in their classrooms. But even when the lesson plans are made and the correcting is done, a teacher will correct her own biological child's grammar at the dinner table. She can't help it. It's who she is. Nurses might put in twelve hour shifts at the hospital. But even when they have changed out of their scrubs and forgotten how to decipher physicians' scribbles, without hesitation and without even thinking about it, they will administer care to a child choking in a grocery store aisle. Caring for people, helping them in medical emergencies is part of her, she can't turn it off.

Humility, compassion, kindness, gentleness and patience are Christian virtues. You are a chosen, loved, holy child of God. Your Christian identity is wrapped up in Christian virtues. Christ's love and forgiveness are yours. Christ's word and peace are living inside of you. Christian, this is who you are. This is your true identity. Amen.