

Sermon Notes – August 8, 2021
(Colossians 3:12-17)

Do any of you remember Mr. Roger's Neighborhood, the children's TV program? One day on his children's program, Mr. Rogers told a story. He came in that morning and he said, "Children, have you ever noticed that some of the people that are bad sometimes are also some of the people that are good sometimes? I have a story to share with you and it's called 'Two Wolves.' An old Indian Cherokee chief was wanting to teach his grandson a lesson about life, and he said, 'Son, there's a battle going on in my life. It's a terrible fight – a fight between two wolves. One wolf is selfish, filled with anger, greed, wrath, and inconsideration. He is just mean. The other wolf is a good wolf. He's loving, kind, considerate, compassionate, and nice. That fight is going on in me and in every other person, including you, son.' The grandson thought about it for a few moments and he said, 'Well, grandfather, which wolf is going to win?' He said, 'Son, the one you feed.' The one you feed."

Paul is telling the people that day that there is a battle that goes on with us all the time. There's the way we lived before we got to know Christ as our Lord and Savior and before the Holy Spirit came to dwell within us, and then there's the life that we're supposed to live when we know Christ and we make him visible to the world. So, today I want to talk a little bit about "Making Christ Visible to the World Through the Clothes We Wear."

Have you ever noticed that sometimes your spouse has a sweater, a house coat, a bath robe or something that they want to wear all the time? There's a shirt that is tattered and holy, but they don't want to get rid of it. You don't have any old jogging pants that you just can't get rid of, right? Sometimes you wish they would just throw it away or you're going to throw it away for them – but you better not! They may go pull it out of the trash. Well, sometimes we have old clothes that we want to wear. There are vices such as anger, selfishness, abusive language, pride, vulgar language, and all those things. We are to get rid of those when Christ's Spirit comes to live within us and we are to put on some clothes – some

new virtues – like compassion, kindness, humility, patience, forgiveness, etc.

C.S. Lewis once said, “We are ordered by Christ to wear his clothing and sometimes it may feel like pretense, but pretense is not all bad because it can lead us to do good.” He goes on to give the example – he said, “If you’re not a particularly friendly person, but you’re in an environment where you need to be friendly, maybe you should put your best manners on and be friendly and act that way – act better than you really are. And who knows? ... You may become that way.” The Holy Spirit is within us to empower us internally to live for Jesus externally.

Clothe yourselves with kindness. “Kindness” here was a Greek word. It came from a Greek word to describe wine. It meant wine that had mellowed with age and it had lost its harshness. It went on to mean “acting charitably and benevolently to others” -- doing for others and responding their needs without being asked or told. Being kind – doing for others without being asked or told -- I want to give you an example of that: When I was in a church in Jonesville, North Carolina, years ago, in the mountains of North Carolina, I served as a Youth Director. I used to drive an old Ford Falcon, if any of you remember what that is. Well, believe it or not, this young girl, college student, had had it all the way through college. Her dad sold it and I bought it. I was in college and it had no carpet, no floor mats in the bottom of it. If you remember the metal floors in the old cars years ago had holes in them and the air would seep up through it. Well, I didn’t have any money to put carpet in that car, so I didn’t have any carpet mats. I worked at the church in Jonesville that summer and I lived with a family in the church – Mr. & Mrs. Martin. They owned a carpet store in Jonesville. One day, I had parked behind Mr. Martin’s car. He said, “Miss Peggy, I need to move your car so I can get to work today.” I said, “I’ll go move it.” He said, “No. Just give me your keys.” He took my keys, moved my car, and then he went on to work. The next day at lunch he said, “Peggy, I’d like to check out your car and make sure it’s in good running shape. Do you mind if I have your keys and drive it off today? I’ll bring it back in a few minutes.” What I didn’t know was that he took my car to his carpet store; he measured the

floor boards in my car, cut out carpet, and put carpet down so that it would be insulated for the winter time and it wouldn't be so cold in my car. I didn't know it. He didn't tell me. The next morning, I got out to go to church. When I started the car, I thought, "Where it in the world did this carpet come from?" and then I remembered that he took my car the day before. "Thank you," I told him. "I am so grateful. How much do I owe you?" He wouldn't let me pay him anything. You see, he saw a need and he responded to it. It was a kindness that I didn't deserve, but he gave it to me. ***Kindness, sometimes, as a Christian, is responding to the needs of others - sometimes without even being asked or told. You see a need and you respond.*** There are many of you in this church that do that.

There's another thing that the Apostle Paul says - that we are to be gentle. Well, Aristotle, the great Philosopher said, "Gentleness is the happy mid-point between too much anger and too little anger." Some would say, it's power under control. It's learning to be firm and strong, but yet you're a little more soft-hearted or soft in your delivery. Well, I want you to know that in the Bible, what gentleness meant was having easier touch and helping those who have done wrong. For example: you remember the story of the woman who was caught in the act of adultery and brought to Jesus? The Pharisees said, "Lord, we caught her in the act of adultery and our law says that she's to be stoned to death." The scripture said that Jesus got down and scratched in the sand - and nobody knows what he wrote. (Now, some scholars say that he wrote down all the sins that those men did - stealing, lying, cheating. Some say he wrote down all their girlfriends' names. We don't really know what he did, but he wrote in the sand.) And it said that all of a sudden, he looked up at them and he said, "Ye that are without sin cast the first stone." They all began dropping their stones and walking away. Jesus helped the woman up from the ground and he said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." Sometimes, we all need somebody to help us when we do wrong, don't we -- somebody to be there to stand with us and walk with us.

The Apostle Paul went on to talk about being clothed with patience. Now,

patience is a virtue and few of us have it. Don't we? We want instant success, instant gratification, instant internet ... we want instant now. We just want it right now. Ask your kids. They want it right now, don't they? We want everything instantly. Patience, here, is talking about forbearing. It is putting up with each other's idiosyncrasies. It is long-suffering, forbearing with one another's idiosyncrasies, and those things that irritate us and get under our skin. I want to give you an example: Many of you may remember reading in history about Abraham Lincoln – you remember when he first started his political career that there was a man named Edwin Stanton who was his political critic and enemy. He would often criticize and slander Abraham Lincoln. He would say (to the newspapers), “You know that original gorilla. You know, why in the world do men go to Africa to capture a gorilla when they could go to Springfield, Illinois and get one?” He called him a “tall, cunning clown.” He was always slandering Abraham Lincoln. But, I want you to know that a few years later, when Abraham Lincoln became President, guess who he appointed to be the Secretary of War? ... Edwin Stanton. And, all of Abraham Lincoln's friends asked him, “Why in the world would you do this? This man is your enemy. He criticizes you.” And they said that the only thing Abraham Lincoln said was: “He's the best man for the job.” Two or three years after that, Abraham Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth in the Ford Theater. They said that Edwin Stanton came to the theater that night. (They had removed Lincoln's body to another room.) Stanton went in, and with tears running down his face, they said he looked at the silent dead face of Abraham Lincoln and he says, “There lies the greatest ruler of man on earth.” What do you think changed Edwin Stanton? I think it was Lincoln's patience, his long-suffering, and his non-retaliatory love.

Jesus calls us to be filled with compassion, be filled with kindness, be filled with patience. I want you to notice that he also calls us to be forgiving as Christ has forgiven us. Forgiveness is not easy, is it? It's not something we naturally want to do; we want retaliation and revenge. Sometimes, we just want to harbor the guilt – harbor the hurt that is there – remember what's done and not forget it. But, Jesus says, “Forgive.” Paul says, “Forgive as Christ has forgiven you” -- not because

it's easy -- not because you're trivializing the wrong that was done - not because it's going to diminish the pain - not because you may forget, but because Christ forgave us such of great sins on the cross. Forgive as Christ has forgiven; it's a choice, not an emotion, and something that can only be done by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us. Sometimes we try to forgive and we take one step forward and two steps backwards, don't we? Sometimes I think I've forgiven somebody and it comes back to me. "Lord, help me." It's a process and a journey, but he says "Forgive as Christ has forgiven you."

I want you to notice something else -- there's three times in the passage of scripture, the Apostle Paul says, "Be thankful. Be grateful. Always be thankful, sing your hymns of praise with a heart of gratitude. And whatever you do for God, always give thanks to God the Father." You know sometimes when we live with an attitude of gratitude, we are less negative and we gripe and complain less. Someone told me one time, "Miss Peggy, one thing we as human beings need to do is, write down five things we are thankful for every day and when we look over that list, it will make us more aware of our blessings and we'll grow in positivity rather than negativity."

Gratitude also makes us more gracious and generous. I heard an interesting story told by a former President of Louisville Presbyterian Seminary - Mr. Mike Jinkins. One day, they were honoring an attorney in Louisville who was a generous donor to the Seminary. His name was Ed Vickery. Mr. Vickery's daughter was going to bring him to the Seminary that day and they were going to honor him at the luncheon, and she was going to introduce her father. She went and picked up her dad that day and she forgot to look at the gas in his car and he didn't tell her that it was almost empty. They were driving on the highway and they got on that long stretch of road before they got to Louisville and they were almost out of gas. Thank goodness, she had a cellphone. She called one of the nearest service stations and said, "Could you bring us two or three gallons of gas to get to your station?" One of the attendants came and brought them some gas and they went back to the service station, filled up, and paid for the gas. When she got back in the car, her dad handed

her two \$50 bills. He said, “I want you to give that to the man who rescued us. You know he saved us from being late today and he came out of his way to bring us that gas. You give him that.” His daughter looked at it and said, “Dad, I think he’d be happy with one of those \$50. You don’t need to give him two.” He said, “Honey, I don’t want him to just be happy, I want him to be ecstatic because I’m that grateful.”
Sometimes gratitude makes us generous.

There’s another story I want to share with you about gratitude. It’s about a young boy who was going to college in the New England area. It was Parents’ Weekend. His mother had died and his father came up to the college. His dad drove his old dilapidated car to the Parents’ Weekend. When he was leaving his son that weekend, some of the son’s friends were standing around him and they started making fun of his dad’s old car. The son said, “You make fun of that old car all you want, but I want to tell you a story about my dad. I wouldn’t be at this college if not for the loving sacrifices of my dad. A few years ago, my dad had the chance to buy a new car and to go anywhere in the world he wanted to go on vacation. But, my dad knew if he didn’t save some money for my education, that I wouldn’t get to come to this particular college. I want you to know that he made loving sacrifices by driving that old car and not going on some those more expensive vacations. I’m here because my dad made a loving sacrifice, and for him, I am grateful. So you make fun of that old car all you want, but I love that old car and I love my dad and I’m grateful for his loving sacrifice.”

The Apostle Paul goes on to say: “Dwell in God’s Word.” Now, I want you to keep in mind that the Colossians didn’t have the New Testament scriptures like you and me. All they had was the Old Testament. They had the memorized stories and teachings of Jesus, and, many times, those stories and teachings were put into songs. So, music became an important part of worship. In the scriptures, he says, “Dwell in God’s Word.” ***If we want to be visible to the world, we need to stay close to Christ, to his Word, and to prayer.***

I want you to notice that Paul is giving us, in this scripture passage, a strategy for making Christ visible to the world. He's giving us a strategy for living for God every day. In essence, he says, "Remember, you're God's chosen. You're Christ's representatives to the world. Live like it!" How do you live like it? ... Put on the clothing of Christ - his compassion, his kindness, his gentleness, his humility, his patience. Remember that humility is not thinking too much of yourself or too little of yourself - it's having a proper perspective of yourself that we come on equal ground to the cross - to Christ. It is remembering that we're servants. Christ said, "I've come, not to be served, but to serve." May humility remind us that we're here to serve. Christ calls us to put on the clothing of Christ. Always be thankful. Dwell in God's Word. Remember that you are Christ's representative in the world.

I don't know where you need to grow today. I know where I need to grow in some of those areas. Is it being more forgiving? Is it being kinder? Is it being gentle with somebody who has done wrong? Is it helping out? Is it being kind enough to do something for somebody that needs it without being asked or told? Christ loves you and me and he wants us to let our love for God and love for one another guide our lives in all we do. May we go to live in a way pleasing to God and visible to the world. Amen.