

We Are The Church Together: A Force

Colossians 3:12-17

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First Christian Church

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12 As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³Bear 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. ¹⁴Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ* dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

This Week we find ourselves at the end of our series titled, "We Are The Church." We have spent the last few Sundays talking about what it means to be the church together. What the church is, and how this church business works, what we the church do. You have heard Dr. Bender talk about (and very skillfully I might add) how the church is our Family, our community that supports us and brings out the gifts in each one of us. We learned how the church is our foundation, our rock which provides our most core beliefs and principles which are at the heart of each of our identities as the people of God. We discussed how the church is our focus, our grounding force that equips us to share the gospel even in the face of adversity and setbacks. We saw how the church is a fervor, a place where we are reminded of God's goodness and faithfulness so that we are moved to respond with worship and thanksgiving. Last week we heard Dr. Skinner talk about how the church is God's tool for wrecking roofs or removing obstacles that stand between people and Christ (and what an incredible sermon and service it was.) And today you are stuck with me and we will be looking at how the church is

God's force in the world to act on Christ's behalf to meet the needs of those around us. Church, we have covered some ground together for sure. And today we are going to cover a whole lot more so buckle up!

Our scripture this morning is one of those passages that one could spend a lot of time studying, I dare say that it could be a sermon series or Sunday school curriculum on its own. It is a short passage that is loaded with meaning and with inspiration for living as the church. Here in the third chapter of this letter to the Church in Colossae we see a plethora of hugely important topics, compassion, kindness, humility, peace, forgiveness, bearing each other's burdens, worship, and thankfulness. Each of these are such foundational principles to who we each are as God's Holy and beloved children and who we are as the church together that it is hard to do them justice all at once. However when we look at this passage as a whole; I think it would be hard to find a better blueprint for what is necessary for the church to truly be God's force for meeting the needs in the world around us. This is a text which teaches and challenges us as individuals and as a community. It calls us to be equipped and ready to be the hands of Christ in the face of the world's needs. It gives us several steps that we must take in order to be the force for God's reconciling love that the church is called to be.

First we are told how to put on our church clothes. The first part of this text tells us how we as the church are to dress, if you will, but not in the sense of not wearing white after labor day or making sure your shirt is tucked in. I don't think Jesus cares about our style choices or lack thereof. Rather we are told how we, the Church, are to clothe ourselves in order to live out our calling. Here we see that for the church to function as God's force in the world we have to "clothe

ourselves” in compassion, kindness, humility, patience, and forgiveness. Initially I admit that I wondered why the text used the term clothe yourselves in this instance. Rather than take up, or have, or show, but clothe ourselves. However I think this description of these, all important traits of the church, is no accident. Compassion, kindness, patience, humility, forgiveness are not just to be things that we strive towards or character traits to check off the list. They are to be put on daily, in every occasion intentionally. Just as it takes time and effort to maintain and put on our clothing (I am still striving to learn to stay on top of the laundry, I mean how many clothes does my wife have?) we have to be intentional and constant in putting on and maintaining our compassion, kindness, patience, humility, and forgiveness. All of these require daily effort. Also in equating these characteristics to the very clothes that we wear, I think the author of this letter also makes another important point about being the church. These principles such as compassion and forgiveness are not some deeply buried internal qualities. They are to be constantly on display, to be seen by all whom we encounter. I mean, clothes are some of the first things we see and notice when we meet someone. If you don’t believe me just think back to a time you spilled coffee on yourself in the morning and then had to go through the day with it, you were self-conscious right? It felt like that was all anyone could see. When I read this text I feel like it calls us to make our kindness and compassion and humility as blatantly and inescapably obvious as a glob of sour cream on a black shirt (that really happened to me last week). This is where I feel this text challenges us as the church. Are the aforementioned qualities the things we truly clothe ourselves with? When someone walks in here, is our compassion and kindness more tangible to them

than the pews they are sitting on, more visible than the super spiffy robes of our choir? When we are out in the community is our humility and desire to bear others burdens as obvious as our First Christian Church T- shirts or the multi colored graphics on the youth van? That, I feel, is what it means if we as the church put on our church clothes of compassion, kindness, humility, and love.

When we look at what is next on the list in order for the church to be a need meeting force for Christ in the world, we see the text take an inward turn. Once we have put on our church clothes this passage calls for us to put on our church hearts. We are called to have hearts that are ruled by the peace of Christ, and absolutely filled with His word. Once again the author does not simply say that we are to have peace but to have hearts ruled by peace. Likewise we are not supposed to have a passing acquaintance with the word of Christ but to have that gospel dwelling richly within our hearts. So what does this mean for us as the church striving to be a force for Christ? Maybe for us having our hearts ruled by the peace of Christ means to put our hope so squarely on him that we are able to keep our peace even when the world, and life, and our mistakes threaten to shake us up. Maybe having a heart ruled by peace means that we are able to remain peaceful when we are tempted to respond to others with a short temper or to get pulled into the gossip mill at our work or school. And maybe for us having Christ's word dwelling in us richly means that we intentionally encounter scriptures in a variety of ways both as a church and on our own so that Christ's word becomes an intrinsic part of us that it is literally alive within our hearts. I'll admit that these two things that the scripture calls us to do are challenging. They take work. Having a heart ruled by Christ's peace might lead us to places where that peace and our

patience are tested. Likewise when we dive so deeply into the word of Christ that it dwells in our very hearts we might encounter things that convict us or challenge us, or even leave us with more questions than answers. These are not small undertakings, but if we are to be the church that is Christ's force in the world then they are absolutely vital. If we are to extend the peace of Christ to a world that lacks peace then we have to have hearts ruled by that peace. If we are going to share the saving and life changing Gospel of Jesus Christ with the people we meet out there then that gospel has to dwell so richly inside our hearts that we can't hold it in. To be the church we not only have to put on our church clothes, but our church hearts as well.

Lastly this passage tells us that we not only have to have our hearts in the right place and to dress for success if you will, we also have to put on our work gloves to be a force for Christ. This passage ends by telling us that everything we do by word or deed, we are to do it all in the name of Jesus and be thankful. Once we have clothed ourselves in compassion, humility, kindness, and forgiveness. Once our hearts are ruled by Christ's peace and full of his word, then we are called outwards. This passage tells us that whatever we do we are to do as ambassadors of our risen Lord. If we, the church, are to be a force for Christ, then all that we do once we leave here is to be done on Christ's behalf. This final admonition has huge consequences for how we live our lives. We can easily see how everything we do at church, every dollar we give, or every committee we sit on is done in the name of Christ. But this calling to do the work of Christ doesn't stop at that front door. The text, I feel, says EVERYTHING that we do for a reason. At our work, our schools, among our friends, and in our community we are called to first and

foremost realize that we are Christ's witness and workers wherever we are. This scripture tells us that there is no task large, small, or in between in which we are not called to be about the work of Christ. We are called to realize that everywhere we go, wherever we find ourselves that we are not just there for us. As the church, we don't go anywhere that we are not ready, and looking for, and expecting opportunities to share our faith in Christ and to meet needs on His behalf. This is what it means to truly BE the church.

This scripture lays on us many daunting tasks. This passage makes some strong claims on us as the church and challenges us to go all in at every level. But there is good news here, sisters and brothers. I have already seen this church live out this scripture.

This past Wednesday, as most of you know, was our off-site trunk or treat down at the Boys and Girls club on East Wichita Street. As I was writing this sermon I kept thinking about all that this scripture calls the church to do and to be. Then, when I saw this church come together for this ministry and outreach event, I knew that I was seeing this church live into its calling as a force for Christ in the world. I saw Church members of all ages clothed in love, and compassion, reaching out to their neighbors. I saw simple acts of kindness like playing games, or giving out candy, all done in the name of Jesus Christ. Good job Church family!

So let us embrace our Identity as Christ's force in the world around us with more passion, more enthusiasm, and more intentionally than ever before. Let's all put on our church clothes, and our church hearts, so that we can go out and do church work. Because I am the church, you are the church, we are the church together... And we have a lot of work to do.