

Sermon on Colossians 3:12-17 for New Year's Eve/Day 2017
Close the Year with Christ. Clothe the New Year with Christ.
St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church – 12.31.17 – Pastor Nate Scharf

Mom would always buy us pajamas. If they were all on sale we got the same kind. But one thing that I learned to just keep quiet about was that mom bought PJs for me either one or two sizes too small. I think it was because she always envisioned me as her handsome thin and trim son. I don't think it was because she was telling me to lay off the snacks and get in shape. I could have misread that though. Every once in a while though, you open a gift and its clothes. They really look nice. And what is better, they fit like a glove, almost like they were tailored for your body. You may even put them on right away and wear them for the rest of the festivities. Your surprise and joy is apparent and the giver is glad too. And you look good.

As you look back on your year, the blessings are apparent and the milestones can be seen – another grade, another year at the job, a new job, retirement, a new child, another year of life, and the list goes on, but in our quiet moments we also reflect on the hurts, the heart attacks, the tragedies, and also acknowledge the wounds and scars left by the moral failures, the sin that we'd like to close the book on and forget if that were possible.

In the last few doctor's visits for myself and loved ones, I've noticed a line of questioning by caregivers getting at whether or not you are depressed or in trouble. And it's true, many of us do find ourselves depressed or hurting. You look at the troubles and the stresses that many of us have to deal with on a daily basis, the uncertainty and the struggle of daily living. You know and hear of many people struggling with addiction whether drugs or alcohol or other harmful behaviors – often trying to cope with something or escape a feeling. You know your own struggles. We know the guilt and shame of our sins and the struggle of this life, the crosses that we must bear, the mistakes of the past and it's just hard. And to deal with it, the devil offers us clothes that are too small, not our style, and just look awful. And so often we are dumb enough to try them on, and only later do we realize how dirty, threadbare and ridiculous they are. These are our sins – promising us the world or at least relief, but bringing only regret.

The apostle Paul described these clothes - *sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed, which is idolatry*. He says to "rid yourselves of all such things as these: *anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language*, and lying. And quit looking to cultural and societal divides.

Christmas Eve and Day may be calendar dates that have passed, but God still has great gifts for you as you leave this year and enter the new. These gifts fit you perfectly and not only do they make you truly joyful and thankful, but they make God glad too. **Close the year with Christ. Clothe the New Year with Christ.**

Look at the name on the present – it's your name: *"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved..."* Look at what God calls you. You are his *chosen person/people*. He hand selected you to be his own. Whether or not you think that is a good choice – he chose you. He sees you as *holy*. You and I know better, right? We know we are sinners, who wore dirty and ridiculous clothes of sin. But God is greater than our hearts and his word is final. He calls you holy in his sight because someone took your sins and ridiculous clothes away. You are *holy*. You are *dearly loved*. So many are fearful of what the righteous and eternal God thinks about them, or they've been lied to or misled about it. But you know how God thinks and feels about you – he *dearly loves* you.

So open the gift. It fits perfectly. It's the most classy/handsome/ beautiful clothing hand made to fit you, your movements, your physique, your skin tone and size. Put it on: *"clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."* That is quite the outfit of attitudes for us to put on, but just realize it's already been pre-shrunk, pre-whitewashed and pre-word broken in by the perfect tailor – God the Son. You see Jesus did all these things perfectly in his life, perfectly *for us* in this life as our substitute before God, and perfectly to us. Jesus saw our pitiful plight –sinners destined for hell draped in drab sinful clothes and he had *compassion* on us – didn't look down on us, but got down with us –born into this world flesh and blood, to bring us up from this. He has granted us his *kindness* time and time again in spite of our failures as he daily and richly provides for us. He *humbled* himself for our benefit and even went to a cross to take our punishment and die so we will not die eternally. He is *gentle* with us not crushing us in our weakness, but turning us always to his cross and resurrection and the strength he provides not to strive after this worlds' idea of success, but to find contentment in living God's plan and in His way. And God is *patient* with us. He waited out our stubbornness, our anxiety, our misspent time and led us to himself and clothes us so richly. So put on these attitudes that have been given to you. They look good don't they?

Read the directions what they'll help you do: *"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has any grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."* Our Savior, Jesus Christ, *bears* each day's struggle with

us no matter how much we may feel alone, he is with us and under that burden with us. He has already paid the burden of our sins, of course he will bear under the struggles of this life and he will help us *"bear with each other."* And since he has forgiven us and gives us the eternal joy of heaven in place of the torments of hell and its shame, Forgive. Let go of the wrath, the anger and the pain you may feel toward others for what they have done, said, or failed to do. God forgave you, forgive like him.

"And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." Love is like the perfectly coordinated scarf or tie that brings it all together. Love, the self-sacrificing care that God had for us undeserving sinners, is the attitude, emotion and will that will drive you to wear this great outfit God has prepared for you each and every moment of each and every day. It's the perfect gift, and it looks good on you.

When you are addicted to something bad and you want to get rid of that addiction, often times you need to replace it with something positive. Some replace the addiction with working out, some with more appropriate beverages and good habits. In this time of year when resolutions often crop up, God has given us perfectly fitting fitness clothes and good habits to replace the bad. But how do we do it, how do we make it more than a couple weeks into the New Year? *"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 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."* Replace the old with Christ – *the rule of his peace in your heart* – free from sin, sins forgiven, heaven as your home, and his love in your life. Think of it and *be thankful*. Take a heavy dose of *the message of Christ* as you teach and learn more about it from the Bible here and at home, lovingly admonish yourself and others with godly wisdom and use God's gift of music about him and for him – hymns, psalms, and songs of praise, here, at home, and in your drive. *And be thankful*.

Christ in your heart and on your mind, gratitude in your actions and attitudes for all that he's done – what a great replacement for all the garbage that often finds its way into our hearts and our spiritual wardrobes.

The farmer gets up so early yet again to make sure the animals are fed and the equipment is ready for next season. The parent wakes up their child to get ready for another day of school and makes sure they brush their teeth even

willing to take the risk of a smell test. The worker planes yet another piece of wood for the cabinets that will be assembled by someone else. The teacher loses more precious minutes of sleep to correct the last few papers. The pastor, staff minister or loved one makes another visit to the memory care unit unsure if their words will be heard or bounce off ancient ears and confused minds. The child makes it through another school day or another practice not sure it will be worth it. The husband loves his wife. The wife helps her husband. The child obeys mom. The invalid opens their heart and prays. No matter the task big or small, God sees you, his chosen one, holy actions and words, and his heart is full of love for you.

I don't know how your year went, but I know who colors it with his love. I don't know what this year holds for you, but I know who has prepared the perfect set of clothes for you to wear – as his child, living for him who lived for you, and with Christ in your heart, ruling your mind and mindsets and blessing all you do with his love. **Close this past year with Christ. Clothe yourself with Christ as you kick off a new year.** It's a perfect fit, and you look good. Amen.