

Year C Christmas 1 30th December 2012

Colossians 3:12-17 NRSV

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

Colossians 3:12-17 (The Message)

12-14 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.

15-17 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.

1 Sam 2:18-20 The Child Samuel at Shiloh

18 Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a boy wearing a linen ephod. ¹⁹His mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year, when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. ²⁰Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, 'May the LORD repay you with children by this woman for the gift that she made to the LORD'; and then they would return to their home.

Luke 2:41-66 The Boy Jesus in the Temple

41 Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. ⁴²And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. ⁴³When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not

know it. ⁴⁴Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. ⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' ⁴⁹He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' ⁵⁰But they did not understand what he said to them. ⁵¹Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

What are you wearing today?

Are you like Billy, wearing his new batman suit on Christmas day for the service here, full of the fun and imagination of entering his hero's role?

My fun as a child with the dressing up box and a long velvet curtain that felt like a regal train when I draped it over my shoulder and paraded with great dignity – I thought! – around the room. Until my toddler brother, watching impassively while sucking his thumb, quietly stepped out behind me and put a firm foot on its end. . . . and again and again. . . .

He obviously didn't see the dignity with which I saw myself!

Or Downton Abbey – would you believe it I saw that for the first time this week. Yes the costumes and fabrics are wonderful But what struck was the face Susan was wearing, every line in her face showing bitterness and unhappiness, and a desire to control and do others down. . . .

And how that community, so affected by that visible and palpable negativity, rallied round to compensate.

Susan affected that community by the face she wore – the attitudes and actions expressed in every line of her face.

Today we come to God's dressing up box. Like every dressing up box, it needs to be explored with care and lots of healthy imagination, teasing out different possibilities to see where they takes us, how that will enrich our lives when put into practice.

God has **provided** us with a wardrobe, his provision for us to wear. Just as we choose what to put on each day, here are 5 virtues he's provided for us! Five virtues for harmonious community living.

Compassion; Kindness; Humility: Meekness; and Patience.

Compassion is a deep and heartfelt sympathy for the situations of others. When we read the gospels, we see that many of Jesus' miracles for the people were motivated by his compassion. Or as it can be translated, **His heart went out to them.** A real **heart**

response to what's going on in another human being's life.

And that leads to **Kindness**. If compassion isn't expressed in kindness it's not likely to change anything. Yet even the smallest act of kindness can change someone's life. Sometimes far more than we'll ever realise.

Humility – maybe not so easy to understand. It's not about being a door mat. That's not humility at all. Humility is the heart attitude that is content to see others as worthy of honour. It means we don't need to use put-downs and gossip to make ourselves feel better than the person we're talking about. Humility tunes into how God's honours the other person, just as he honours ME. God honours ME – yes of course he does! Why else would He express that love in Jesus? And equally YOU!

And **Meekness** – similarly this isn't anything like the traditional image of meekness meaning having no backbone. Meekness is the quiet inner strength that

enables us to be gentle and not throw our weight around to make others think or act like we do.

And with all that, we will soon be growing in our final virtue – **Patience** - with each other and the circumstances of life. A self discipline to wait, letting go of that ever-present desire we all have, to get our own way.

All these virtues overlap and link into each other. Each stimulates growth in the others as they develop them.

They also challenge the attitudes we bring to daily life. The times we think or say something like, " S/he has no right to say/do that to me! I'm not going to let them forget that. " Or, "I'm having no more to do with them"

What is it that Paul tells us in his letter? ¹³Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other;

Forgiveness. Necessary in every part of daily life. And never easy. One of the things that grieves me deeply, and I believe grieves the heart of God, is hearing this

–“I can NEVER forgive him/her (usually nameless) for that . . .”

And I know deep and painful offences such as violence and abuse or deliberate malice are very painful to handle and forgive, and these need more help than personal spiritual discipline. This requires a deep and honest process over time. But whatever the offence, we need to hear the next part of the sentence too.

“Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”

Forgiveness, as the Lord has forgiven you. It’s understanding that Jesus died for **me**. My sins were enough for him to die on the cross – never mind anybody else’s. And similarly **you** too. For each one of us individually, **even if we were the only one**.

And so as we look at each other, **we are looking at someone for whom Christ died**.

So a pause. A pause to begin a process now, or simply to offer a prayer now for the Lord to work on later.

Is there someone in this congregation, or in another area of life, whom you avoid? Or are angry with? Or have a negative reaction against whenever their name is mentioned?

Then take this thought to work on. “Such-a-body (*by name*), Jesus died for you, just as he died for me. You and I are sinners, forgiven.”

It may well stick in our throat to try to say it. Yet this is the gospel we are called to.

Compassion, Kindness, Humility, Meekness and Patience.

“All bound together in love.”

If you look at different versions of the Bible, you’ll find different ways this is translated. The Greek can be understood as love being like a belt which pulls all the virtues together in a useful way, or it can be seen as a coat worn over everything else, making it rich and real. Both are images worth exploring in or imagination.

And I think this translation fits the bill, whichever way we see it – “And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It’s your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.”

As we stand of the opening of this New Year, let’s look at this wonderful wardrobe God has picked out for us.

Compassion; Kindness; Humility; Meekness; and Patience.

What are God’s clothes for you in this New Year? What clothes are you as an individual, are we as a community, already wearing? And which ones need to be brought out for a good airing? And regular wearing?

As we dress each day, it may be no bad thing to follow the Celtic way of prayer in using the actions of getting dressed to prompt our daily thoughts of the care God invites us to take in wearing the wardrobe He has picked out for us.

In our imagination in exploring this, let’s delight in what we find in God’s dressing up box for our lives.

Amen.