

Enjoy Your Christmas Presents!

A sermon based on Colossians 3:12-17

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.

So, what'd you get? Lots of good stuff? I'm sure you've already established a hierarchy of which presents are the coolest, that you can't wait to use, and which ones you had to put on the fake smile after opening and give it your best "Oh, I love it!" while seriously wondering how much use it's going to get.

Odds are, there were clothes received that are the wrong size and need to be returned. There're toys that will be broken and forgotten about before long. That's just the way Christmas presents tend to pan out.

But God's gifts, given to us as Christmas, they last a long, long time. They never get old. They never wear out. They never break. And this morning, we're encouraged to enjoy them, to keep enjoying them, to never stop enjoying them!

Hopefully you haven't grown too tired of all your Christmas gifts from this year yet! Are you happy with everything you received? You know, usually, at least in my experience, the gifts that are least appreciated at the time are the ones that receive the most usage. Do you know what I'm talking about? The clothes, right. Did you get any new Christmas sweaters? Maybe a new tie? Or even some more pairs of socks to replace the ones the dryer or the dog ate?

As we've seen throughout all our Christmas celebrations here this year, there's been a great gift exchange going on. In that little baby born in Bethlehem, God has gifted every single one of us the greatest single present ever, salvation through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

We are so incredibly happy that God got our names for this gift exchange. Because he hasn't just given us that one gift. He's filled our spiritual closets with brand new Christmas clothes! Listen again to Paul's words, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, CLOTHE yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience...forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another...And over all these virtues put on love."

Wow, sure sounds like our closets are full of plenty of new clothes for our New Man to wear. "Compassion" is what the Samaritan felt toward the man who was beaten by thieves and left for dead along the side of the road. It is what Jesus felt toward the crowds who "were like sheep without a shepherd." It sees the hurt of others and is moved to do something about it.

"Kindness" is a goodness found in God and demonstrated by God in his saving acts. It is also a quality demonstrated by the believer as he/she forgives his neighbor who sins against him/her.

"Humility" was demonstrated by the tax collector, who would not even look up to heaven as he prayed and even more so by Jesus, who became man, a man who was obedient to death.

"Gentleness" is a characteristic which Jesus ascribes to himself, which makes his followers willing to come to him and learn from him. It is a magnetic quality that attracts cautious people rather than pushes them away.

“Patience” is what makes us willing to “suffer long,” even as the Lord suffered the pangs of hell for us and continues to tolerate our sinfulness, willingly forgiving us every time.

How are we even so lucky, or better, so blessed to have all of these garments as our own? They flow out of the loving forgiveness the Lord has given us. Awesome work, God! Can’t wait to try them on, right?

Are we always that excited about these gifts God has given us? Are we always that eager to get those clothes, those spiritual and godly characteristics out of the closet? Or is the reality that we don’t always treasure those gifts and are content to just leave them hanging up unused or tossed into the corner, forgotten, like the person who gets new clothes for Christmas, says, “Oh, these are pretty; I can’t wait to wear them!” but the clothes just sit and gather dust?

“Compassion on others? I don’t see anyone else jumping at the chance to help me when I’m in need. It’s much easier for me to focus on taking care of myself and my family and leave others to fend for themselves.” “Gentleness? I don’t really like people, don’t really care for most people, so why should I have to speak and act in a way that’s not going to be pushing them away?” “Patience? You mean if this person is being a complete jerk to me, not only do I have to put up with it, but I’m supposed to forgive them for it? I don’t think so.”

Let’s face it. It’s much easier for us to grab the dirty clothes that are scattered on the floor or sitting on top of our dressers than it is to go into the closet and pick out something new to wear. And the same is true with our sinful nature. It seems so much easier to crawl back to our Old Adam, let him take the wheel and steer our lives instead of fighting him so that the New Man can take control.

For most of us, though, that might not be so much the problem. Not always wearing those characteristics, however, is probably more of the issue. Like that sweater you wear a couple of times, really comfortable, but after going in the wash, it got a little pilly, and quickly falls out of favor.

“I always try to be practicing humility and putting others ahead of myself. I want to be able to look to their interests, but 100 percent of the time...now that’s asking a lot. It’s hard to do that.” “I was trying to imitate Christ’s kindness and keep on forgiving my friend for screwing up, but he kept going right back to what he was doing, and I eventually just got tired of forgiving him. I shouldn’t have to do it anymore.”

And sadly, in every one of those instances, the main piece of clothing God always wants us to be wearing, the piece that brings all the other characteristics together, love, it’s missing.

I don’t always show the same love God showed me. Neither do you. And you know what God’s response is? To just throw us into the corner of the closet, never to think about us again? No. Paul says, “Forgive AS THE LORD FORGAVE YOU.”

Even though you and I sin, we are forgiven. Why are we forgiven? In our gospel, Simeon tells us why, “For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.”

It’s because of the child who has come, clothed in light, clothed in glory, the child who is wearing your salvation and mine. Don’t let his humble birth fool you. Simeon and Anna saw beyond that. They saw redemption for the world in the Christ-child.

And that's exactly what Jesus was. At many times throughout his earthly ministry, it didn't look like that. Even though Jesus perfectly wore the characteristics of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, love, he was still mistreated by sinners, like you and me...even hated by them, by us.

And in humility, Jesus suffered and died on the cross. But therein lay the real work of our salvation and redemption. Jesus donned the dirty garments of our sins on the cross to save us, to redeem us, to forgive us. His death clear all those filthy clothes of sin out of our spiritual closet and replaced it with clean linens of his righteousness for us to wear.

You know, God's Word continually reminds us, because of Jesus, his life, death, and resurrection, those are the new clothes we get to wear. The book of Lamentations reminds us, "The LORD'S...compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is [his] faithfulness." That baptismal font reminds you of your baptism...that your sinful nature is drowned, washed away...you are clean, you are clothed with your New Man, whose closet is full of those godly characteristics. Because we're forgiven, we gladly put on these new Christmas clothes of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, love.

And you know, those clothes look good on you. Every one of those characteristics fits right in line with God's taste!

A closet full of new clothes - Jesus' gift to us - is fantastic! But wait! He gives us more! What does Paul say? "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." What's the other gift God has given us for Christmas? A book...his Word.

Did you get any new books this year? You know, we have those books on our shelves where you read them once and you're done with them. But aren't there others you keep there to re-read. I'd certainly re-read a Tom Clancy novel again. Maybe there's one you even pull out every year.

We have a better book still from Jesus. Just like those clothes in your spiritual closet, don't let that book sit in the corner and gather dust. Instead, let the Word of Christ dwell in you. Let it dwell in you richly!

"Why would I want to read God's Word again and again? I'm always going to hear the same thing, either law or gospel, just like with these sermons."

But the truth is, God's Word never gets old. It's not a one-and-done kind of book. It's so fresh, the way God relates the simple message of his loving salvation to us in so many different ways: Jesus, our Good Shepherd, laying down his life for his sheep...Jesus, our Prince of Peace, fighting our spiritual battles so we are at peace with God...Jesus, our sacrificial Lamb, slaughtered on the altar of the cross to appease God's wrath against all of our sins...Jesus, the Servant of God, submitting to God's will, even though that will was for him to die for us. And that's just a tiny portion of the riches of God's Word.

You read a book, and entertainment-wise, you are satisfied. Read The Book, and you have the greatest satisfaction. True peace dwells in you...peace with God that leads to putting on the Christmas clothes and being at peace with one another. The Book fills us with peace...and it fills us with gratitude. And full of gratitude, we sing..."psalms, hymns, spiritual songs..." Those two fill us with peace and gratitude as they clearly convey God's love and Christ's redemption to us!

So, did you get great Christmas presents? If you did, you say thank you, might even call or send a hand-written card to show your appreciation. Well, I know you got great Christmas gifts. You got Jesus. You got his full and free forgiveness. You got new clothes in your spiritual closet. You got The Book on your shelf, ready for continued reading.

We are blessed! Thank God for his great gifts. "In 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." Amen.