

Colossians 3:12-17

“As God’s Chosen Ones”

First Sunday after Christmas (C)

December 29, 2024

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.

Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

“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 3:17).

Merry Christmas! The promise has been fulfilled, since the promised Messiah is born!

The birth of Jesus is a sign and a reflection of the heart of God the Father toward His people. The love He shows His people comes in the form of His only begotten Son Jesus Christ. The embodiment of forgiveness and mercy comes in the form of the Christ Child in Bethlehem.

Today, on this First Sunday after Christmas, we now turn our attention to the impact that Christ’s birth has on the world and the implication that His birth has on His faithful people.

You see, Christ’s birth changed the world. Christ’s birth changed you. From the very beginning, the Triune God – *the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit* – knew what He was going to do. He was going to save fallen man from their sins.

So, there in the manger is the fullness of God. He may be crying for His mother Mary’s attention for food and drink, but He knows why He has come. He has come to live the life God calls on all of us to live, but inevitably fail because of our sinful nature. He has come to receive a sinner’s baptism, to suffer and die for yours and my sins, so that by grace through faith in Him, we would live forever.

Through the coming of Christ, He has fulfilled everything His Father asked of us. As we just proclaimed through singing today’s Hymn of the Day:

*“He undertakes a great exchange,
Puts on our human frame,
And in return gives us His realm,
His glory and His name,
His glory and His name.”*

(Let All Together Praise Our God, LSB 389 stanza 4)

As a result of Christ's work, the image of God has been restored to all who cling to Jesus as their Lord. Now, this perfect righteousness and holiness is not seen now, but it will be seen in eternity.

Since Christ has redeemed His chosen ones – *you and me* – through His death and bodily resurrection, and through the work of the Holy Spirit at your baptism, we now live as new people. We are now holy and beloved. And as holy and beloved, we show this character toward others.

You see, the virtues of the Christian life are displayed toward other people, even when we display less-than-perfect conduct toward our neighbor.

So, the new Christian life ought to break with the old vices and be filled with Christian virtues. The virtues of the Christian life are to be permanent, distinguishing marks of the Christian.

By God's grace, we have been made a special people, a people who belong to God and are united in fellowship with Christ. So, what are these distinguishing marks of a Christian? They are: ***“compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive”*** (Colossians 3:12b-13).

Now, back in the time of St. Paul, lowliness and humility were attitudes that were thoroughly despised by the pagan world. And, not much has changed since then. It is still the same today. But lowliness and self-sacrificing humility are the characteristics of Jesus, who calls on us to imitate His humility. And where humility exists comes a peaceful atmosphere where we each count each other as better than yourself and we rejoice in serving others.

Another distinguishing mark is gentleness. Sometimes when we think of being gentle, we think of *“putting on kid gloves”* by treating someone with extreme care to avoid causing any offense. This is ***not*** the mark of a Christian. We are not spineless. But we ought to exhibit gentleness in our dealings with others as we overlook insults in the spirit of forgiveness.

Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus encouraged His disciples to cultivate a forgiving spirit. He taught them to pray: ***“Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us”*** (Luke 11:4). He forgave His enemies from the cross, and on that cross, He endured justice that makes the injuries we suffer at each other’s hands minor indeed. And even now, though we spurn His love, Jesus daily restores and forgives us.

If we truly understand His forgiveness, we should never question in our hearts about our willingness to forgive one another.

When St. Paul encourages mutual forgiveness, he is not speaking of a forgiveness with conditions. Jesus never put conditions upon His forgiveness. And the forgiveness that we give to one another should not have conditions, either. As God’s chosen ones, we are to offer immediate, unconditional forgiveness in the spirit of Christ.

So, what kind of forgiveness are you showing in your life? Are you placing conditions upon your forgiveness? If you are, it’s time to ask for help from your Savior on how to forgive. For where there is forgiveness, then quarrels, resentment and hatred are extinguished.

But did you know that God provides an opportunity for displaying Christian virtues and He even supplies the power in doing them? He calls on us to ***“let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God”*** (Colossians 3:16).

The Scriptures should be more than something we hear on Sunday mornings and Monday evenings or something more than an invited occasional guest in our homes. The Word of God ought to inhabit our lives continually as it fills every corner of our lives with its blessed spiritual wisdom. The Word of God ought to be the hub that each Christian family revolves.

When the Word of God inhabits us, we grow in faith and knowledge and in Christian living, and we will be able to encourage one another and teach and admonish one another. When we ignore the Word of God or use the Scriptures infrequently and carelessly, we deprive ourselves of the Lord’s blessings. When we ignore His Word, we take off Christ as we choose to walk with the fallen world.

Even here in the Divine Service, God supplies the power in doing Christian virtues. Through the proclamation of the Word of God, and through prayer, music and song, He empowers us for faith and life. Through ***“singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,”*** we give praise and thanksgiving to God.

In the Divine Service, God leads us through Scripture, prayer, and song to right belief. This Latin phrase is true *“Lex orandi, lex credendi,”* which means what you pray is what you believe. So, through spoken voice and song, through spoken prayer or silent prayer, you are what you eat. There was a good reason the Roman Catholics of Luther’s time were concerned with the people singing Luther’s hymns as they said, *“The people are singing their way into Luther’s doctrines.”* Now, to be sure, those doctrines in Luther’s hymns are not Luther’s, but God’s. However, the gist of their comment is true. So, what we consume has a profound effect upon our beliefs.

As ***“God’s chosen ones,”*** there ought to be no division between the sacred and the secular as Christ accompanies us in all facets of life.

So, ***“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 3:17). We give thanks to God, since there is no truer friend than He. Merry Christmas! Amen.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +