

A New Year - A New Life

Well, 2018 is about over. You may be very sad or very glad. As a church, we have elected new Elders and Deacons, had some changes in staff, and installed Jeff as our Pastor. We have also had some leaders and staff who have been with us and leading us well for quite a while. And we have made some changes to our building. But now it is time to think about the coming year.

The Apostle Paul has some very good advice for us as we heard in our Scripture lesson. He says that we are living in a new life and need to put the old life behind us. I believe this is true for us as individuals as well as a church. So let's look at what Paul tells us.

I - Paul says we are to put on, to exhibit, the characteristics of Christ. We are to put on a new wardrobe. *“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 offence. Forgive as quickly 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.”* (Col.3:12-14, The Message) I believe that for the most part, we do this pretty well, but not perfectly. There is room for improvement. Here for the need for a little more humility - there for forgiveness - here for a dose of kindness - there for a whole lot of patience. As Paul puts it - *“Let the Word of Christ (which is the word of love) dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another.... 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.”* (Col 3:16-17) In other words, keep on doing the good that you've been doing, and with the help of the Spirit of Christ at work in you, reflect more and more each day Christ's loving life. John quotes Jesus saying, *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this will everyone know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”* (John 13:34-35)

Love is, and always will be, the key to our life as individuals and as a congregation. Love, that is, like that of Christ - love that is selfless, caring, understanding, sacrificial and forgiving, as was Christ's. We need to grow as a church. A key to that growth will be our demonstration to the community around us, and to the world, of our love for one another and for the whole world which God created and loves so very much. When people see such love in action, they want to know more about it, which opens the door for us to share our faith. We need to be more willing to share our love, to share our faith, and welcome new people into our fellowship.

II - So what is this wardrobe that we are to wear as followers of Christ? Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, says, "*By grace you are saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God...*" (Eph 2:8) We believe, have faith, that God loves us, in spite of ourselves. Christ's life and death is a tremendous "yes-vote" for us. It brings us into the family of God. Being accepted by God does something to us - it frees us to be our true selves, to accept ourselves, and to put on a new wardrobe, a new life. Part of this is that we can accept others in the same way that we have been accepted, as they are. This is where Paul uses all those words to describe our attitude, our wardrobe, and how we relate to others. "*Have compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline, be even tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offence. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And, regardless of what ever you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all purpose garment. Never be without it.*" (Col.3:12-14, The Message)

Love is the binding power which holds us and the whole Christian body together. The tendency of any body of people is sooner or later to fly apart. Love is the one bond which will hold us together in unbreakable fellowship. (Barclay page 159)

This is how we are to live, how we are to relate to one another. It is not always easy. But it is how Christ has accepted us and how we are to accept each other.

The theme song of the movie “Love Story” says, “Love means never having to say you’re sorry.” I suppose it is possible to over do saying you’re sorry. But I do not believe any relationship, can survive or grow without somebody saying, “I’m sorry.”

One evening a father came home and discovered a major offense. He grabbed the girl he thought was guilty, gave her a licking and sent her to bed. Later, he discovered the other daughter was totally responsible. He had made a serious error. Slowly he went into the first child’s room, sat down next to her as she sobbed, and told her what he had discovered. Then he uttered words parents often forget to say. He admitted he had made a bad mistake and said that he was *truly sorry*. He hoped she would forgive him. She got up, wiped the tears from her eyes, gave him a big hug, and said, “*Daddy, I forgive you. We all make mistakes.*” (Becoming a Family, p. 129) In that moment, father and daughter both grew closer together.

You have probably seen the Liberty Mutual insurance ad that ends, “*Nobody’s perfect.*” It’s true. But love and forgiveness open the door to healing, whether it is between God and ourselves, or between ourselves and others.

III - So what is next. We could spend hours on this but we are not going to. Let’s listen again to what Paul says. “*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.*” (15-17) Literally, Paul is saying “Let the peace of God be the *umpire* in your heart.” If the peace of Jesus Christ is the *umpire* in our heart, then, when feelings clash and we are pulled in two directions at the same time, the decision of Christ will keep us in the way of love and we, and the Church, will remain in the one body it is meant to be. The way to right action is to appoint Jesus Christ as the *arbiter* between the conflicting emotions in our hearts and minds. And if we accept Christ’s decisions,

we cannot go wrong. (Barclay, p. 159) Sounds very practical to me, though not always easy. With God's help, let's work together to live good lives and help one another, all to do God's work here and now.

I would like to close with a Peanuts cartoon. Lucy says to Charlie, *"Life is a mystery, Charlie...do you know the answer?"* Charlie replies, *"Be kind, don't smoke, be prompt, smile a lot, eat sensibly, avoid cavities and mark your ballot carefully. Avoid too much sun, send overseas packages early, love all creatures above and below, insure your belongings and try to keep the ball low..."* To which Lucy replies, *"Hold real still because I'm going to hit you a very sharp blow to the nose."*

I hope that we wear Christ's clothing and attitude like Charlie and avoid being like Lucy. May Christ's Spirit be within us every day of the new year and each day of our life as individuals and as a church!

And all the people said - "AMEN!"

By Chuck Falconer, December 30, 2018