

Colossians 3:1-11- Preached on August 5, 2007

3So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, ³for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

⁵Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). ⁶On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. ⁷These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life.

⁸But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices ¹⁰and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. ¹¹In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

What kinds of clothes do you own? Think about what you have in your own closets and dressers. I'm sure most of us have some warm and cold weather attire, at-work and at-home clothes, and dressy and casual outfits. My husband Matt, who has taught high school chemistry, even has his own section of pants and shirts that have acid burns, which he wears on days where they do labs in the classroom!

And what we wear says a lot about who we are. Now don't get defensive here – I am not preaching about needing to have good style sense or how to put together a fashionable outfit. But what we wear does reveal who we are.

I sometimes go into the Blue Cup coffee house, and while I'm drinking my coffee, I watch people come in and go out. And a lot of times, it is pretty revealing as to what kind of job they have or what they do for a hobby or lifestyle. Some people come in with a blue mechanics shirt and their name embroidered on it. Others come in with overalls and flannel shirts. Some come in wearing hospital scrubs. I have seen a few black leather outfits - and wouldn't be surprised if they didn't drive in on a Harley!

And no matter where we go, clothes give something away about us. We know that a woman in a wedding dress is getting married. We know that someone in a sports team uniform is on his or her way to a game. We know that someone in a swimming suit is going to the pool or beach. We can guess that someone in a clergy shirt is most likely a pastor or religious leader.

But most of the time, clothes distinguish us from one another. We don't want to have the exact same outfit as someone else – I remember in high school how devastating it was if you showed up to the prom with the same dress as someone!

Sometimes wardrobes really set us apart from others – it is very easy to tell who the movie stars are when we see them dressed up in million-dollar outfits and in all the glamour and glitz of Hollywood. And it is also easy to tell, in that very same city, who the poor and homeless are – the ones who have not had a hot meal or a bath in days or weeks and who are dressed in rags.

Our clothes reveal who we are...and most of the time this is simply the way we live in our culture today...it's just how it is.

And then we hear the reading from Colossians. And we are told that there is no such thing as individual wardrobes when it comes to Jesus Christ. Clothes don't matter. Outfits don't matter. The size of our closets and dressers are not of importance.

In fact, clothes are so unimportant that we are told to strip them off! Now please don't take this literally, even though it would make for an interesting church service. I'm sure the bishop would have a few choice words for us if that happened...

But this goes much deeper than us being told to simply take off our clothes, listen again to the reading, "You have stripped off the old self...and have clothed yourselves with the new self."

The apostle Paul is saying that in Christ, in having faith in Jesus, our clothes and our very SELVES are stripped away and made clean, and we are given a new self and a new outfit to wear.

And this time the new outfit is enveloping us with radiance. Our new outfits are the never-ending love and presence of Jesus Christ.

And there is no better time to be reminded of this than today, when we are welcoming Kaden Casberg into the family of Christ through baptism. Our baptisms are when we are promised this new outfit, it is when we are promised that Christ is always with us, surrounding us with love and continual forgiveness of our sins.

Baptism is when God throws away the old clothes of sin...those things that separate us from God. In the waters of baptism, God clothes us with Christ himself...we are literally washed clean and given a new garment to wear.

Kaden is wearing white today, which is usually the color worn at baptisms. It is symbolic of new birth, new life in Christ, and cleansing of sins. And remember how I mentioned a few minutes ago how clothes reveal who we are?

Well, the white garments reveal WHOSE we are. We are God's children. God claims us as God's own.

And there is nothing that can separate us from God. Faith in Jesus Christ is the best article of clothing you will EVER have!!

And you don't have to buy it. Jesus Christ already paid that price in his own death and resurrection. You don't have to worry if it will look good. We are promised that our garment of faith is beyond beautiful. It is dazzling and life-giving!

And this new outfit will never fade or wear out. No matter what is going on in our own lives, God will not abandon us. When loved ones die and we are overcome with grief...God is there, weeping with you. When our friends and family are deployed to war...God hears your prayers and is with those in Iraq. When bridges collapse...God is with those who were trapped, and God was with those who died, and God is there with the families and friends who are mourning.

When was the last time you reminded yourself that you are a baptized and beloved child of God? As people of faith, this can be a very helpful part of our journey, to remind ourselves that we wear the garment of God's love. Martin Luther loved to write about ways to remind ourselves of our baptisms. One way he mentioned is when you're in the shower! He even suggested that you cross yourself and say, "I am a baptized child of God."

Another way to remember your baptism is to look up the day you and each member of your family was baptized and to celebrate it somehow – kind of like a baptismal birthday party!

Even wearing the color white is a good way to remember that you are a child of God.

It doesn't matter how you remind yourself...what is important is that you remember whose you are and that it cannot ever be taken away. I'll let you be creative and come up with some other baptismal reminders!

And while our everyday clothes distinguish us from one another, our new baptismal outfits do just the opposite. Our baptisms UNITE us into one family in Christ. Listen to Colossians, "In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free...but Christ is all and in all!"

What wonderful words for us to hear! There is no separation when it comes to Jesus Christ. It means that in Christ, there is no distinction between race or gender, no separation between the rich and the poor, no distinction between those who have the new iPhone and those who still have the rotary dial phones. Christ is the unifying presence.

How are we as a congregation living this out? How are we wearing the baptismal garment as a church body? My first impressions of being here are that this is a welcoming place. You have welcomed my family with open arms.

It is wonderful to see you greet new people that are here on Sundays. Are there ways that we can grow more fully into being united in Christ? And I have every expectation that God will continue to strengthen this community to reach out and share Christ with all...and to shine with our new baptismal garments of mercy and grace.

Let me read those words from Colossians one more time: “In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free...but Christ is all and in all!”

What wonderful words, but what CHALLENGING words for us to hear as well. In Biblical times, the difference between being circumcised or uncircumcised was a big deal. It would be similar in our day to being a US citizen or an immigrant. And to hear that in Christ, those distinctions are not important, is quite challenging for those that heard it long ago and for us who hear it now.

What does that mean for us now? What does it mean to be a community of faith that does not make distinctions that are deemed important by our society or country? It means that we greet everyone in the same way – with open doors, welcoming arms, and a table of bread and wine that is shared with all who believe. We honor God when we do that. We honor our baptisms when we do that. We honor Christ.

And so we gather today and welcome our newest brother in Christ. Christ will renew each one of us in our own baptisms today as well, and may each one of us go out from here wearing that new baptismal garment of faith. Amen.