

Colossians 3:12-15(ESV) ¹²Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³bearing 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. ¹⁴And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.

Amen.

A worthwhile vision for the people of Saint Mark is for each of us to have a growing and vibrant relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe God can use such a person to be a magnet to draw people into the Christian faith and into the church.

The Holy Spirit is the drawer of people. The Holy Spirit woos us. The Holy Spirit pursues us so we will commit our lives to Jesus and live for Him. Once we are saved, the Holy Spirit works steadily inside of us to change us, to transform us, to remodel us, to rebuild our lives into a growing and vibrant Christian man or woman. Vibrant means there is something inside of us that is attractive, something about us that is appealing, to put it bluntly, something about us that acts like a magnet whereby people feel drawn to us because we are oozing with the life of Jesus from the inside out. I know there are two sides to magnets; one side draws, and the other side repels. Joyless Christians are magnets that repel. Joyful believers in Jesus Christ have something beautiful coming out of them and draws people to want to know the source of their joy.

Every church has its faults, including ours. Every family has its internal struggles unique to each family, specific dysfunctions. We bring our family struggles to church, our own personal dysfunctions which then creates a specific atmosphere in the church that can be quite hurtful as the people around us experience the dysfunctions that you and I bring. The Lord Jesus makes it quite clear that one day we will be held accountable to God for every word we spoke to one

another, every word. This leads me to my first and main point. 1. Be careful what you say for one day you will answer to God for every word and not only that but the way you spoke those words. Those who spoke the truth in love, with compassion and mercy, will be more honored in heaven and receive more reward in heaven than those who would walk up to a person in the church expressing their opinion in an inappropriate manner. God hears our every word, at home, at work, at school, at church and He is listening. When I think of this, I so wish I could take back the harsh words I have spoken but once the toothpaste is out of the tube, you really can't put it back in; be careful what you say.

Lent is a time of increased personal evaluation, self-examination. We ask ourselves the questions, "Where have I let sin creep into my life unaware" or where in my life am I resisting the work of the Holy Spirit to change me?" "What relationship with other people is God asking me to work on so reconciliation can take place and personal friendships can grow deeper?" These are excellent questions to ponder, especially during Lent as we seek to put God first, to love God first, and to love one another in the same way that God loves us. This I know to be true. When we harbor harsh feelings toward one another and hold on to long-held grudges, it plugs up our fellowship with God and inhibits our prayers from being heard. It also blinds us to God's blessings that are right in front of us and all around us. God takes our relationships one to another with utter seriousness because he created us to be relational beings first of all with God and with one another.

Last week I was sitting in Sunday school with the class and I was able to watch people in the fellowship hall as well as pay attention to our teacher, Jeff McKenzie. There was a gentleman who walked into the fellowship hall all alone. I feared something might happen and it did. He walked over and got a cup of coffee and then he walked around and looked at every bulletin board as if what was on them was and is exceedingly important. I was hoping someone would see him, introduce himself or herself to him and at least say hello; it did not happen.

There were probably at least 35 to 40 people in the fellowship hall conversing. After class I went right up to him and found out that he and his family had been visiting our church for the last 3 weeks. He brings his wife and has his two small children in Sunday school. I almost left the Sunday school class to go out there and converse but chose to stay in class; that was probably a wrong decision. It is so easy to just talk to our friends and exclude others. If we are serious about wanting more people in the pews, let's act like it and show Christian love to the stranger among us. Any person standing reading the bulletin boards all alone is a good place to begin. I know we have some that spot visitors right away but those two or three cannot do it all. During Lent maybe make it your spiritual discipline to get out of your comfort zone, your easy chair and speak to a person who has no one speaking to him or her. Who knows that one conversation may encourage that visitor to come back again and maybe even eventually join the church? You may be God's instrument of God's amazing grace.

Every time you come to worship, I am asking you to wear the clothing God asks you and me to wear. During my growing up years we always wore our best clothes to church – suits, ties and polished shoes. Ladies would not be caught dead in church wearing pants. There was a rule somewhere that women must wear dresses. Today preachers preach with holes in their jeans and body shirts showing off that they lift weights. Some think it important to wear leather jackets making them look like a bunch of people ready to ride a Harley. I often tell them that they don't have to dress like a pig when they are worshipping the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. So far, I have not been able to change their minds and yes, we are still friends, at least I think so. Whether or not we wear nice clothes or play clothes to church, God has clothing that He asks us to wear and here they are: ¹²Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,

God is asking us as His chosen ones and yes, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ you are among God's chosen people. God chose you and asks you to wear these clothes since you

are God's holy people and totally loved by God. Because God loves us, chose us, and is remodeling us to God's image so we will be holy in His sight, God gives to us His dress code. God starts with putting on compassion. I interpret compassion this way. Those who wear compassion actually come to church in order to show concern to those in the church. I drink coffee on Sunday mornings which means I have to get rid of coffee on Sunday mornings; you know what I mean. I walk rather briskly to the men's room avoiding all the people in my way because, well you know why. At that point I am not wearing compassion at all. All I can think of is myself and my full bladder that is about ready to burst. When we do not put on compassion all we can think about is ourselves when there are so many around us starving for Christian compassion, wanting to know and feel that they are genuinely cared for in this place of worship. I so wish at least one person would have put on compassion and speak to the gentlemen all by himself in the fellowship hall reading the boring bulletin boards. We don't want to be caught naked, not wearing compassion.

The next piece of clothing is kindness. I see this as taking the time to greet as many as you are able before and after worship and during the fellowship hour. Simple acts of kindness go an awful long way. Years ago, a very young mother came to our church with two very little children. Somebody in the church walked up to help her and that simple act of kindness touched that lady so much that she joined the church and is still with us to this day; wearing kindness draws people back. Not showing kindness and compassion repels people. We want you to be a drawing factor and not a repelling factor.

Two other pieces of clothing are humility and meekness. Humility prays to God, "Less of me and more of thee." The opposite is coming to church thinking you are better than those you are worshipping with. It is called self-righteousness and is that ever a repeller. Humility seeks to serve those around you putting to use your spiritual gifts and to do it with meekness, strength under God's control. A new generation of people come to church wondering if this church is

good enough for them and will meet their needs. A Christian attitude comes to church wearing God's dress code seeking to serve and not be served.

Don yourself with patience. Patience is the ability to endure unpleasant people or circumstances for a higher cause, giving time for God to act. Us in the older generation may not like unruly children in church. Let me tell you there are many churches devoid of unruly kids and those churches are soon closing their doors for good. I am so proud of our confirmation students who sit up front, listen well, and take notes. When asked to come down from the balcony they do so without complaining at all. I want to give the Lord a hand for the young people in our midst.

"if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." When you put on the piece of clothing called forgiveness, you are wearing this right over your heart and it may be one of the most important pieces of clothing that you wear. It is God's will for you to forgive everyone who hurt you, harmed you in any way, ridiculed you, abused you, teased you, bullied you, laughed at you, spread rumors about you, and did not behave in a way that meets your standards. God asks you to forgive and to completely let it go just as God has forgiven you all of your sins. The only time not to forgive is when you do not want God to forgive you. The longer you wait to forgive, the heavier the weight on your shoulders and the more you are resisting the Holy Spirit. Saturday night after church I returned home to hear these words us husbands do not like to hear. Terry, we have a problem. I said, "Is it the stove?" "Is it the furnace?" Really what I was thinking, "What did you break now and why did you do it?" No, I did not say that and for once exercised self-control, self-control that did I do not have. "The kitchen sink is totally plugged." I said, "Oh, that's easy." "I will go into the bathroom and get the plunger." My wife immediately stopped me and said, "No, you do not use the bathroom plunger in the kitchen sink." Being raised on a farm, things like that do not

bother me but that is another story in and of itself. Janet graciously went to Walmart and bought a new plunger and after three plunges the water flowed out and the sink was restored.

When we fail to forgive as we have been forgiven, the flow of close fellowship with God gets all plugged up and we can't even see the blessings God has given us that are right in front of us. The good news is God's grace is so powerful and free it will move you to completely forgive and let go of the offense so you can once again have a growing and vibrant relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and be a magnet in this church and no longer a repeller. The flow of close fellowship with God is restored.

I close with Paul's words without comment: ¹⁴And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Amen and Amen.