

“Love—The Only Garment You Need”

Pentecost 7

Colossians 3:12-17; July 19, 2020; 10:00 am

Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO

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PRAYER

God of wisdom and insight,
May the words that I speak, and the ways they
are received by each of our hearts and minds,
help us continue to grow into the people, and
the church, that you have dreamed us to be.

Amen.

Colossians 3:12-17 The Message (MSG)

¹²⁻¹⁴ 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 offense. Forgive as quickly and completely 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.

¹⁵⁻¹⁷ 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.

BE LIKE BETTY

Actor Betty White turned 98 this week! You probably know her best from the fabulous sitcom about the Golden Years called “Golden Girls.” She’s a Six-time Emmy winner, with a career on big and small screen, spanning seven decades, and she’s still going strong!

When asked the secret to long life, her secret is to **“accentuate the positive, not the negative.”** As for her diet, she says her favorite items include vodka and hot dogs, “probably in that order.”

I love to hear from folks who have lived a long and meaningful life what “their secrets” are! And then to seek to emulate any good ideas I glean from them. I have a number of “late life models” I admire greatly and want to be like when I am in my Golden Years.

Not crazy about vodka and hotdogs, myself, but I do think we could all seek to be like Betty in faith and life. I look to scriptures often to find that guidance (besides Bing Crosby songs like: Ac-Cent-Tchu-Ate the Positive!)

“You've got to accentuate the positive
Eliminate the negative
And latch on to the affirmative
Don't mess with Mister In-Between”

I find often that just the right scriptures come into my head at just the right time. Last week, in reminding ourselves of our complete “belovedness” by God our Maker, I shared my all-time favorite scripture from the Hebrew Bible—Psalm 139. *“For I have knit you together in your mother’s womb.”* What more reassuring words can we hear than that in life?!

Today, I have chosen my all-time favorite New Testament passage, for I believe these six verses “nail it” for how we are to live, love and walk together in Christian community.

I first encountered this beautiful passage from Colossians 3 in college. Why? Because we sang a song!

“Because you are God’s chosen ones, because you are kept in his care.....”

FIVE VIRTUES FOR LIFE AND BELOVING

Right in the heart of this passage are 5 “keys” to a life of loving –ourselves and loving in community. Paul uses these “Five Virtues” as we might call them in a number of his letters. Kind of like the “Fruits of the Spirit.” These five virtues: “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience” can be guidelines for life if we allow them to be.

They are characteristics of God or Christ, *and* they describe the character of active Christian living we are to be about as God's chosen people—chosen to be especially dedicated to God because God loves us.

What if we made these 5 Virtues our theme for the year? Here at CUCC. What if every Team meeting started with reading and praying these beautiful words from Colossians 3? What if every agenda had these 5 virtues across the top:
Compassion, Kindness, Humility, Gentleness, Patience

(Team leaders talk to me—I’ll send your very own!)
All year long, let’s make this our theme, and focus on being God’s Beloved, Chosen community together, clothing ourselves with these things.

Bearing with one another.
Forgiving one another as the Lord forgives us.
And over all of life—in all its ups and down, challenges and setbacks, progress and moving forward in joy and vitality—putting on Love—wrapping ourselves and one another in the clothing of Christ, and letting the peace of Christ channel through us in powerful, ever-flowing streams.

We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools. **Martin Luther King, Jr.**

And we must start with ourselves: Have a right spirit within (Arlene shared at Council the other night)

Psalm 51: 10 - 12

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a **new and right spirit** within me.
Cast me not away fro thy presence
and take not the Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of thy salvation
and uphold me with a willing spirit

Thankfully, we don't have to guess or read a lot of books on relationships and conflict resolution. Jesus lays out the step-by-step instructions pretty clearly in Matthew 5, in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount! Let's look at Jesus' tips for living into and out of those 5 Virtues. This week we look at how to deal with conflict, according to Jesus. Next week, we will explore what it is to be blessed and be a blessing in our community.

JESUS: "This is how I want you to conduct yourself in these matters. If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God."

1. BE PROACTIVE

Go talk to them. Not about them!

You are responsible to take the initiative. Go to them. Don't fret about *whose* fault or say, "They should come to me." They might not have a clue that there's anything wrong! Or, that they've done something to hurt you. The other person might have a dramatically different idea of what took place.

Go to your brother or sister.

Reconciliation is needed not assigning rightness or wrongness or figuring out where to place blame.

Listening with a truly open heart and ears to hear one another's perspectives, experiences and approaches to things. Giving another the space to truly hear means setting judgment and preconceived notions aside. Sharing different perspectives must be seen not as "defensiveness" but seeking clarity and understanding together.

2. BE RECONCILED

To each other.

After talking at length, and truly hearing one another's hearts, the goal is *not* that you will necessarily agree about the situation that caused the disagreement or conflict in the first place. But, that you are **reconciled**—agreeing that your relationship with each other is more important than the dispute. No winner or loser. No who's right or who's wrong.

You reaffirm the importance of the relationship and commit to moving forward in healthy ways.

Exactly the same understanding of what went on?

Probably *not*!

A conversation to reaffirm the importance of the relationship and commitment to the relationship going forward.

"Renew a right spirit within me and my connections with others, Dear Lord."

3. BE PERSONAL

Did Jesus say, Send a telegram?! A text, an email?

Even write a letter? Nope. He said, "If you know you have something against your brother or sister or they have something against you," go to them!! Talk.

Directly. One on one, or even better, with 2 or three.
No letters.

Pastors hear this a lot: A person will come to the pastor and complain about someone. The pastor listens and then says, “I can hear your concerns, but I cannot do anything about them. You need to go to them and talk this out.”

98% of the people in the world would rather have a root canal than do that! Or worse! It’s essential to address conflict directly *with* the person.

“But, can’t I just write a letter? Or send an email?”

Nope! A letter is unilateral. One direction.

You might be tempted to tell them how you were right and they were wrong. That’s unilateral and it’s *not* dialogue. A conversation is *dialogical*. It’s *reciprocal*. Two-direction (or three, or four.)

The goal is *not* to prove oneself right, but to talk AND listen. To heal the relationship.

The goal of “being heard” is not necessarily to change the other person or their behavior. You might be thoroughly heard but not see your ideas put into action –for any number of reasons. That doesn’t mean true dialogue or mutual listening hasn’t occurred.

4. BE QUICK

Make it the highest priority.

Jesus: if you are heading to church, or the temple with your offering....set aside the gift and go to the person.

Every day we wait the cancer grows. The hurt feelings fester and the relationship is less likely to be restored.

If you’re upset and perhaps angry and not centered, and wouldn’t respond with your best self, maybe wait a

day or two to calm down. But that’s it. Don’t let another Sabbath pass. That’s a good rule of thumb.

(Note: There’s one exception to Jesus’ instructions if you need to talk to the pastor–me or anyone else! Five minutes before 10 is not a good time!)

Don’t be an *enabler*. Don’t allow yourself to be triangulated.

Listen to the person with the concern because you care. Because you are their friend.

But, then you must say, “Have you talked to Joe (or Josephine) directly? I’ll go with you for support if you like (this avoids she said/she said), but I can’t hear anymore about this now.”

Be filled with the Spirit–not filled with gossip and triangulation.

SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

Some are good at this. Speaking bluntly “their truth.” That’s not what real “Speaking the truth in love” is. It can come across too harshly or insensitive. You might have won the argument but lost the relationship.

TWO Parts to this:

Most of us fall down on one side of this or the other.

We completely avoid confrontation or dealing with conflict head-on; or we are too confrontational!

We lean toward one strength or the other.

We all need to practice this–build on your strengths and work toward more comfort on the other half of “speaking the truth in love.”

Come, talk to me. Talk *to* each other. In person. Not *about* each other.

Take chances; take risks in relationships. Take steps forward in courage. It's so worth it!

Be patient with one another. Be compassionate with one another and ourselves. It's so worth it! Experience joy—right relationship: With Jesus, Others and You!

(Adapted from "Healthy Churches Manage Conflict Well," sermon by Rev. David Dethmer)

MAKE ME A CHANNEL

We began our worship today asking to be "channels of peace."

As we go into our week, let us make this our prayer.
"Make me a channel of your Peace, your Compassion, Kindness, Humility, Gentleness, Patience."

When we seek to live as God's beloved ones, we commit to being channels of all kinds. "Channels of blessing" to one another, as the old hymn goes.

Channels of Christ's love. Let us bear, build up and belove one another as Christ first loved us. Amen.