

And Be Thankful  
Colossians 3:12-17  
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
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It started when our boys were young. The difference between occasions when they could wear anything they wanted, which usually meant sweatpants and t-shirts, versus those occasions when they needed to dress up...these began to be distinguished when we would say, "You need to wear your church clothes." You know the clothes I'm talking about...shirts with a collar...pants with a zipper and button, not just an elastic waist.

Our passage from Colossians, thankfully, is not giving us a literal dress code for when we come to church, but as Traci pointed out to the children, it does remind us as people of faith about some things we should put on...things we should wear...and even more than externally, things that should be part of our identity and visible to others.

The author writes, "Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, [gentleness], and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body" (Colossians 3:12-15a, NRSVUE).

Compassion...kindness...humility...gentleness...patience...forgiveness...love...peace.

This is the stuff of the Christian life. Right? This is the stuff that we are taught to do. And more than just "do," this is what we are taught to embody. These are attributes we connect with Jesus and thus, as his followers, they are things that we also strive to live out.

And yet we know how difficult these seemingly simple concepts can be in practice.

Although we could, we don't even have to look as far as national and world events where wars are raging and food and medical care are taken from those who are barely getting by. We don't have to look as far as our neighbors who treat others with contempt rather than kindness or who choose violence against their loved ones rather than patience and forgiveness. We don't have to look toward those whose social media posts are anything but humble or whose interactions with others are anything but gentle.

While we might prefer to look toward the sins and shortcomings of others, the reality is that living from compassion and kindness, humility and gentleness, patience and forgiveness, love and peace...this is difficult for all of us, even those of us who are really trying.

So, what tools do we have to help us do this with greater effectiveness, with greater intention?

I suspect we can name a number of things. Let me name just a few.

There are practices such as prayer and meditation and mindfulness, practices that help to change both our physical and spiritual selves. They help to center us, to slow us down, to allow us to catch our breath. And when these practices are part of our lives, then we are more likely to use them not only in quiet moments set aside for that purpose, but we are also more likely to know how to employ them in stressful and surprising moments that otherwise might knock us off center.

Community is another tool we have. Surrounding ourselves with people who share our values matters. It's not that we should run from everyone else or silo ourselves with *only* like minded people - those practices have created their own set of issues. But, having people in our close community with whom we can have important conversations, with whom we can talk through difficult struggles, people who we trust to help hold us accountable to living as we intend...that is an amazing help on this journey of life.

And do you know what other tool we have at our disposal? Gratitude.

Did you hear it mentioned in our text? See I think we often focus on that first list of things. And perhaps it's because we know that just being kind and gentle, patient and forgiving, loving and compassionate...just doing all those things can feel like a tall order. So, perhaps we stop really listening.

But then comes that one little sentence in this reading: And be thankful. And then again gratitude is mentioned as our passage ends with the call to always, in everything we do in word or deed, do it giving thanks.

But what does gratitude look like? What is the impact of gratitude?

Donald McCullough in his 1998 book *Say Please, Say Thank You: The Respect We Owe One Another* writes this: "if I'm too busy to take five minutes to acknowledge a gift - a friend shopping for groceries, say, and preparing a delightful dinner - I'm not simply in danger of Miss Manners hauling me before the court of public opinion and throwing the book of etiquette at me, I'm just too busy for my own good and the world's too. If I always move forward to the next task on my agenda without pausing to look back in gratitude to the good things I have been given, I allow my almighty self-importance to blind me to the truth of things: I am completely dependent on others, and every achievement of 'mine' has been won through a team effort" (18).

He goes on writing, "And there is another reason why we should say thanks: it helps us. When we express gratitude, we experience, however fleeting and brief, a moment of contentment. When we say thank you, we heave a sign of satisfaction in a world of grasping. Instead of reaching out toward more, we pause to enjoy what we have" (19)

How would our lives be different if we lived from gratitude, from a position of interdependence and contentment?

How would the world look different if everyone, from those who feel completely without power to those who wield high levels of power, if everyone were to live from a place of contentment and satisfaction? How would the world look different if all of us, every last one, knew that we needed the others, that everything we do and are and achieve has the fingerprints of other people on it?

How much easier would it be to be kind when we weren't seeking more and better, but living from contentment?

How much easier would it be to be patient and loving when we looked in the face of another and saw someone whose existence was essential to our own?

Friends, Thanksgiving is this week. Many of us will sit around a table, whether with a large group of loved ones, at a community meal with strangers, or even at our own table by ourselves or with just one other person. And many of us will pause for a moment to say "thank you" and to recognize the gifts in our lives.

But gratitude is not reserved for the fourth Thursday in November. It is not reserved for our mealtime or bedtime prayers. Rather gratitude is an invitation to a way of life.

There is a church in Decatur, Georgia called Thankful Missionary Baptist Church. I wonder what it would be like for us to claim our gratitude so boldly. I wonder how it would change us if thankful was claimed as our primary attribute.

Maybe today is the day to claim it. Maybe today is the day when we say with our whole lives, "I am grateful." May it be so.