

Colossians 3:1-17

“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you once walked, when you lived in them. But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on 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 the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 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.”

Here we are January 4th 2015 and in spite of everything that has happened this past year we have survived. If it were not for all our hard work and everything we did, we could never have made it. Right? But wait what everything we did, what did God have to do with it? Also does what we did have to do with being and living as a Christian? How does any of what we did effect being Christian?

Anyone who has ever sung in a choir knows “harmony” doesn’t come easily; at least that’s what I am told. Harmony doesn’t come naturally to human voices. For a choir to find its voice, to find that sweet spot of harmonious sound, it takes hours and hours of discipline, hard work and practice — and possibly a real “drill-sergeant” of a director. But the results are so sweet and beautiful. The results are a blending together which creates something more powerful and perfect than any single voice can ever achieve.

There is a show on television, which I refuse to watch first of all because it’s called “reality” television, which it’s not, and secondly because I’m convinced they know the winners beforehand regardless of our votes or those of the judges; judges are there just for show. But the show called “The Voice” is all about one thing, the ultimate solo.

The author of our passage this morning wrote to the Colossians and he clearly has no interest in solo spots. Paul is not about solos but instead is all about singing together and creating harmony within a community of faith. But what needs to be understood is that harmony within a community of faith doesn't take perfect pitch. It doesn't take a great ear. It doesn't take even the ability to blend together smoothly. Creating harmony within a community takes only one thing. Those who would call themselves members of the Body of Christ must "*clothe themselves*" in a new wardrobe, the wardrobe given to them by Christ himself. The clothing provided cloaks disciples in a mantle of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, and love. It's only when the Body of Christ has "*put on*" all these Christ-like characteristics that the community can resonate with the harmony of the Prince of Peace.

Author Timothy Radcliffe tells the story of Mother Theresa going to a party in her honor attended by important people in Rome. Before entering the party, she stopped to talk at length to a beggar nearby.

People began to come out to look for her, and began urging her to come in since many heads of states from around the world were waiting for her. She responded abruptly: “Can’t you see that I am talking to Christ?”ⁱ

At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Christ; His coming into this world as a Savior for this world. But now it is time to celebrate the presence of the living Christ by embodying Christ in the world through our own interactions, intercessions and interventions. Here’s an idea, instead of some “New Year’s Resolutions,” let’s all make **A** resolution, one that makes a difference: let’s make a resolution to fully commit ourselves to being a “little Christ” in the next year to come. After all that is what the word “Christian” literally means: “little Christ.”

Wow! Wouldn’t that be great if every one of us made a resolution to be “little Christ’s” this year? Remember this, to be resolute which is where we get the word resolution means to be firm in purpose or belief; steadfast; unwavering. What could happen if every one of us here this morning became resolute (firm in our purpose or belief; steadfast; unwavering) to being “little Christ’s” this coming year? The possibilities are astounding, but we must be resolute in this.

I have heard from some saying we have to cut back, we need to slow down, and worse of all saying “we don’t have the money.” Based on what December alone, by the grace of God brought us, this passage is saying to us this morning now is the time to continue doing the ministries we do and to start new ones as well. Now is not the time to slow down. You never slow down near the end of the race, now is when you go all out, you empty the tank, leave nothing on the table. You never want to look back and say “what if I had done this” or “what if we had done that.”

A farmer was being questioned by a lawyer during a trial concerning an accident on a highway. The lawyer asked the farmer, “Is it true, Mr. Jones, that when the highway patrol officer came over to you after the accident, you said, ‘I feel fine’?” Farmer Jones began to answer by saying, “Well, now, me and my cow Bessie were driving down the highway in my pickup truck when...” At this point the attorney interrupted, saying, “Please just answer my question with a yes or a no; did you say to the officer, ‘I feel fine’?” Farmer Jones then tried to answer the question again. He said, “Well, now, me and my cow Bessie were driving down the highway in my pickup truck when...” The attorney stopped him again and this time asked the judge to intervene.

He said, “Your honor, would you please instruct the witness to simply answer my question with a yes or a no.” The judge said, “Why don’t we just let him tell his story?” So, Farmer Jones told his story. “Me and my cow Bessie were driving down the highway in my pickup truck. Bessie, of course, was in the bed of the truck. I heard a loud bang and knew that I had blown out a tire. The truck then went flying off the road and landed in a ditch. I went flying out of the truck on one side of the highway and Bessie landed on the other side. When I woke up, that highway patrol officer came over to me and said that Bessie was in awful shape. He then went back over to Bessie, pulled out his gun and shot her dead. Then he came over to me and asked me how I felt and I said,” ‘I feel fine, just fine.’”

Fear causes us to do things and say things that we might not do otherwise. Fear can be a powerful motivator in our lives. Too often fear is a destructive force with little redeeming value. In our Scripture reading, the Apostle Paul encourages us to “*let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts....*” He even goes on to say that we have been called to this experience of peace in Jesus Christ. We were built and designed by God to be a people of faith, not people of fear. Faith in the one who redeems us will lead to peace.

When tempted to condemn people, offer compassion. When fueled by anger over something, opt for kindness. When you know you are right and you have might, choose humility, choose meekness. In the face of frustration, find patience. Instead of standing in judgment against others, find the seeds of forgiveness. Don't give in to our earthly nature; allow God's peace to rule your hearts. Do you see an avenue we should travel don't seek the safe and easiest route. Go for it with God leading the way.

Alone we cannot make these changes. We cannot bring about these changes in our human nature just by saying so or writing them out on tee shirts, cups, or banners. Listen to me; New Year's Resolutions don't work. The reason New Year resolutions don't work is because we're still in charge. Becoming a new person within this new reality of a living Christ means opening up to the power and presence of the Prince of Peace. It means allowing Christ to transform us and transfigure our solo humanity into a group harmony, allow Christ to transform us into what I am hearing a lot about lately, a family. And as a family nothing can hold us back.

This past week I read about an old Scottish tradition that placed much importance upon the New Year. Folks visited from house to house as the New Year rang in, wishing each other a good year while celebrating with food and drink. Once midnight passed, each household watched expectantly to see who would be the very first guest to cross the threshold of their door, thus foretelling what the next year would hold. I can just envision a knock on the door and families gathered around the hearth to see who would take that first important step into their home. Is your heart open? Let us welcome Christ in as I close with one such prayer called the Open Door.

Open Door

By Jane VanOsdol

I open the door of my heart this New Year ...
to see Your glory all around me;
to hear the whisper of Your voice;
to smell the fragrance of Jesus in my life;
to taste the fruits of Your blessings;
to feel the presence of Your Spirit.
Welcoming your footsteps across the threshold of my
heart,
Anticipating the gift of another year.
Amen.

ⁱ Timothy Radcliffe , *Take the Plunge: Living Baptism and Confirmation* (2012) pp. 103.