

Give the Gift of Love

St. Mark Lutheran
Three services

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Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also 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 one body. And be thankful. Colossians 3:12-15

Well, the gifting period has come and gone, and many seem glad that that part of the Christmas season is over. One point has again been made clear to me. The gift-giving season is very stressful for some people. I have heard the following complaints in regard to giving gifts: 1) It is hard to figure out what to give some people; 2) I gave a gift that was rejected, which made me feel bad; 3) Going around and shopping for gifts takes too much of my time. Now many people have solved this by shopping online these days, but when the gifts don't arrive in time, that is really stressful.

But we should be careful to not overlook two things about Christmas. First, our focus should be on the gift God gave us, a Savior, to save us from our sins. Second, It should be pointed out that it is one thing to know that Christmas is about Jesus, and it is another thing to focus on that. But there is one gift that can be helpful to almost anybody, and in many cases doesn't cost us any money. That is the gift of love.

Our reading from Colossians 3 this morning reminds us of who we are. We are God's chosen ones. As was said in one of our Christmas messages, we have been born again by the Word of God. We are children of God. And yes, having been born as children of God, there are expectations about how we should behave. Jesus summarized this with his words as quoted in John chapter 13, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another."

The Apostle Paul wrote the words we read from Colossians, probably during his first imprisonment in Rome, where he spent at least two years under house arrest. He specifically addressed a number of different areas in which we need to reflect God's love in how we handle various situations. He speaks of them like someone might speak of clothes that they put on. As Christians, when people look at us, they should see these things. Let's examine them one by one.

Paul speaks of compassionate hearts. Compassion simply means that we sincerely care about other people. We notice the needs of others and try to help or try to get help. Compassion is the opposite of cold and heartless. Compassionate people are concerned not only with themselves.

Paul also speaks of kindness. Kindness includes not only saying nice things, but doing nice things. Kindness is going above and beyond the call of duty to help someone out. I was the beneficiary of kindness the day before Christmas. I was down in the Great Lakes Mall shopping, and I bought a number of gifts, all in one place. The lady handing the sale commented that all of the gifts were pretty heavy, so instead of putting them all in a large bag that might break, she put some in one bag and the rest of the gifts in the other. So far, so good.

But I decided to make my way down to Dick's Sporting Goods Store to see if I could improve on one of my gifts. I hesitated about doing it because the bags were heavy, and I was short on time, but I resolved I would make it a quick trip. I got to the back of the store and suddenly one bag broke and everything came falling out. Much to my surprise, a store clerk some distance away saw what had happened and rushed over to pick the things off the floor. He told me to wait right there. He went and got two bags from his store, put them together to make them stronger, and placed the fallen gifts in them. I was impressed that he cared, and it helped me a lot. I headed right home with a good feeling about him and a good feeling about the store.

Paul speaks of humility. Humility means to be humble or meek in spirit. Meek does not mean weak. It means you lay back and don't push yourself on others; you don't insist on having your own way. Also, you recognize that whatever skills you have are gifts from God, and that being human, you still have your weaknesses. You don't spend time thinking how great you are, or even worse, telling other people how great you are.

Paul also speaks of gentleness. Gentleness is the opposite of "road rage". There seems to be a lot of that going around today, and a lack of courtesy or being patient when driving. What would you do if someone handed you a vase worth over \$5,000? You would handle it very carefully, wouldn't you? Treat people who are around you the same way. Handle them very carefully. "Clothe yourself with gentleness..."

And Paul speaks of patience. I am told that the Greek word here carries the idea of being pleasant in unpleasant circumstances. Be patient when the fast food worker around you doesn't know what he is doing. Be patient when the bank teller messes up on his first day on the job. Be patient with people who don't understand you or don't agree with you. Pastor Don Beaumont gave a great demonstration of patience at our Circuit Christmas Dinner in December. They lost his order, then messed up his order, and then they finally brought it very late, after most of us had finished eating our dinners. He gave a good display of Christian self-control for the rest of us.

Then, there is a sixth item of clothing for a Christian. It is set apart, and I would have to think more important than the others, because our Lord has given us a direct command concerning it. We are to bear with one another and forgive whatever grievances we have with each other. This is especially important in our families and in our church.

So Paul reminds us this morning that we should be "...forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." Think of all the things you did in 2018 that you shouldn't have done. Think of some things you should have done that you didn't do. But if you are sorry and confess that you have done wrong, Jesus forgives whatever grievances God has against you. He holds no grudge against you, and he requires that you not hold grudges against someone else. We show our love of others by reflecting the love Jesus has shown for us. What a great gift we can give to others!

Our reading also tells us that help is available to enable us to do this. That's why Paul gives this advice: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." You see, our contact with the things of God, strengthens us spiritually in our efforts to be good representatives of Jesus Christ in a world that is closely watching how we behave.

So let this be our New Year's resolution in 2019. Please repeat what I say: I resolve in the year 2019-to clothe myself with compassion-with kindness and humility-with gentleness and patience. I will forgive-as the Lord has forgiven me. And I will show love-just as God has loved me. God, please help me in doing this. Amen.