

**A Call to Community in Christ** | Colossians 3:12-17  
Outreach Pastor Sam Creagar | Faith Evangelical Free Church  
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*12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

*15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

How do you know when you are part of a community?

What does it take for you to feel like you belong with the people you're with, that you "fit in", or that you are among folks who line up with who you are or who you'd like to be?

Back in 2011 I moved to Denver to attend seminary. I was out there on my own – Alison, my wife, was back then my fiance and still living here in Manhattan. At times that first year was hard, and pretty lonely. As someone who tends to be more introverted it's hard for me to make new friends or find new community, and I often struggle to connect with people without having some prior reason to do so.

However, there was this one time when I put myself out there and ended up "my people", a community that just felt right the moment I met them. There happened to be a pretty big K-State basketball game being aired on national TV, and I'd heard that a group of Denver-based K-State alums were planning on gathering at a restaurant to watch. Anyone who could say they knew full well that special spot not in forest or yet in dell was welcome to join the watch party. (For those of you less familiar with K-State...that's a line from the KSU's "Alma Mater")

So I decided to give it a try and go watch the game with my fellow K-Staters. I found the restaurant, walked inside...and didn't see anyone who looked like they were to watch the Wildcats. Which made me a bit nervous, but as I walked around I realized there was another section of the restaurant that had more TVs, and as I entered that space...I was greeted by a wonderful sea of Purple and White.

I'd found my people, my community. They had all the right jerseys, knew all the right words to all the right fight songs, knew the players names and stats forwards and backwards, and they knew how to get on the same page with the person to their left and to their right when it was time to Wabash.

Part of what it means to be a part of a community is finding people who have a desire to pursue the same kind of things, share the same sort of values, and enjoy the same core identity. It doesn't mean every single person thinks the exact same thing in the exact same way at all times (that restaurant was FILLED with a wide variety of opinions on starters and coaches and play calling).

When we're in a community we are among people *who want to work together in order to stick together*. Something bigger than themselves keeps them coming back to each other.

This morning, in Colossians 3:12-17, the Apostle Paul gives us a vision for what **Christian community** ought to be like. He tells us the sort of attitudes we should have toward one another. He tells us the kind of things we should be doing together. And he reminds us *what it is that is bigger than ourselves* that must truly unite us – it's not an ideology, it's not any human institution, and it's not even a great leader or group of people. Everything we do, everything we are, the entire weight of our identity both individually and and collectively as a church...it all depends on Christ.

Whatever we do, whether in word or deed, we do it in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

In this passage Paul gives us a big list of what it means to be in Christian community. Each distinctive is worth taking the time to consider and understand, and worth our commitment to grow in and get better at. But overall, I think Paul's message in vv12-17 can be summed up like this:

***Being members of Christ's community means being committed to pursuing Christ's character, together.***

For us to be “the church” – for us to be the body of Christ on this earth carrying out his commands and conforming our lives to his will, we have to strive to be more and more Christ-like, together. This will of course require an individual effort from all of us. But it will also require us to learn how to do these things and live this way alongside one another. **The Christian life cannot be achieved alone.** We're a body, together. We're a people of unity. And we need to work together to stick together so we can share all the wonders of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit with the world, together.

We can do this. But it's going to take some work. Let's get started by exploring what it is we're called to do.

*12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*

Paul tells the Colossians that all Christians – collectively, together, as a community – are “*God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved*”. This is a continuation of a crucial point he has been repeatedly making throughout this letter. **We are who we are because of what Christ has done.**

- Because we have been made alive in Christ (3:1-4)...
- Because we've put to death the things of this world in favor of following Christ (3:5-9)...
- Because we've become the “new self” both individually and corporately with identities defined by our common faith in Christ (3:10-11)...
- And because we the church – locally, globally, and eternally – are God's chosen people thanks to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ...

Because of all this we must – each and every one of us, together, as a one body with many parts – **we must be a people committed to living our lives according to and in imitation of the character of Christ.** (*Being members of Christ's community means being committed to pursuing Christ's character, together.*)

We have to make all aspects of our identity secondary to that of being children of God. That does not mean that your culture, history, or family don't matter. But it does mean that you are not ultimately or primarily defined by those things. If you are a follower of Christ, then you are first and foremost a beloved member of God's chosen people. And because of this, you must be willing to commit to pursuing the kind of life and character that makes it possible for you to live joyfully and peacefully with this great big Christian family you are now a part of.

And Paul says that the first step in living well together is to realize there is a dress code. Not for your body, but for your heart, mind, and soul. To be a part of Christ's community you've got to clothe yourself in the virtues that most look like those of Jesus.

***Compassion. Kindness. Humility. Gentleness. Patience.***

**Compassion:** The literal translation of the Greek word that's been rendered "compassion" is actually "bowels of mercy".

- In the ancient world your guts were considered the seat of your strongest emotions.
- To have compassion is to mercifully care about someone, to love them deeply, and to enter their suffering to the extent that it becomes your own suffering, too.
- The core of who you are connects with and feels the pain of others.
- This kind of compassion is supposed to happen within our church community.

**Kindness:** Keep it simple, this is just being good to people.

- Being good to one another.
- Acting with kindness, believing the best in one another, and seeking to bless one another in any and every way.

**Humility:** The exact opposite of selfishness and self-centeredness.

- You must value others above yourself.
- You must look to the interest of others before your own.
- You live to love the people on your left and on your right.
- It is interesting to note that this was the virtue that the culture in Paul's day hated the most.
- It was the one the Romans didn't understand at all. To be humble was to be a coward.
- But in just a moment we'll see why that is a woefully misguided understanding of what it means to be humble.

**Gentleness:** Some translations use the word "meekness" instead. Both are great.

- If we're gentle, we abandon any claim to anger or hatred or aggression toward each other.
- There is a popular theological dictionary that says gentleness is "the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance" (BDAG).
- If I am gentle then I do not need to be the most important person in the room.
- I don't need to diminish others to improve my stock.
- A light touch and a gentle heart is infinitely greater than all the meaningless strength and bravado I can create on my own.

**Patience:** The opposite of resentment, revenge, and wrath, which all seek to grab all I can for myself, as much as I can, as fast as I can.

- Patience allows us to give others the gift of time and understanding.
- Patience remembers we've got eternity ahead of us, so we can handle discomfort, oppression, and even persecution.
- Patience assures us and reminds us that if things aren't okay right now, we have a promise that they will be some day. And so, if we must, we can wait.

Now...that is a very nice list. Who wouldn't want to add those virtues to their life? Who wouldn't want that to be the character of the community they are a part of?

But here's the thing that raises the stakes: we aren't just any community. We are Christians – Christ followers. Which means mere definitions and descriptions are not enough. We cannot truly say we are pursuing these virtues...*unless we also consider, study, and submit ourselves to the example of how Jesus modeled every single one.*

It was the **compassion** and the mercy of Christ that led Jesus to walk the road to calvary and be nailed to the cross. To clothe ourselves with compassion means to clothe ourselves in sacrifice. Our example is Jesus, refusing to choose himself, instead giving up himself for all of us.

It was the **kindness** of Christ that made a way for our repentance. Think about it, as you read the Gospels, Jesus is always like “yep, you too; you can come and sit by me, you can come and seek forgiveness, you can come to me and I can change your life, forever, because you know what...I just want to.” The limitless kindness of Jesus is our example and our standard for the kindness we need to share with one another.

It was the **humility** of Christ that allowed for the miracle of the incarnation and the possibility of our salvation. Nothing says it better than Philippians 2:

*5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

Our model for humility is Jesus' own willingness to go from Son of God to servant of all. The Romans were wrong. And our culture is very, very wrong. **Humility is not cowardice.** It is part of the essence and the character of the Lord of all Creation.

It was Christ himself that declared his heart to be **gentle** and humble, capable of providing rest for all the weary souls that came to him seeking peace (Matthew 11:28-29).

And it was the **patience** of Christ that allowed and continues to allow time – time for people to seek him out. Time for confession, forgiveness, and repentance. You and I have been given patience from God in all our sins...we must share that same gift of patience with others, too.

These are the sort of virtues God values most. This is the character that Paul says must come to define our Christian community. But we can't stop there. Paul gets very specific about what kind of situation these virtues must be applied to:

*13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

Our compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience for one another must be expressed in our willingness to bear with one another in difficult circumstances and pursue forgiveness in our conflicts for the sake of preserving our Christian community.

Again, Christ is our example. He sets the pattern and the standard for what forgiveness looks like. We don't forgive each other because we're so great. We don't forgive each other because it is easy, or because our conflicts are no big deal. We forgive because we have been forgiven. We forgive because we want to be like Christ.

In order to complete this large-scale vision for the virtues and character of the Christian community, Paul adds one more:

*14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

Above, around, surrounding, and encompassing all things...we must have love. Love is the binding, unifying force of all the virtues. Love is the binding, unifying force of our church. Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, and forgiveness can only attain their full power if they are unified by love.

When looking over this list it is important to remember that these are commands, not options. There is not a single virtue listed here that you can choose to ignore and a follower of Jesus Christ. It is also important to remember that these virtues are presented in the context of being what is necessary for the being "God's chosen people" – that means our church community is brought closer to obedience and discipleship when we are all, together committed to pursuing these virtues. It also means that if any one of us is dismissive of these virtues, if anyone feels like it's just not part of their personality to be compassionate or kind or loving...that decision hurts our church. It wounds our witness to the world. And it misrepresents who Jesus is.

These things are not optional in the life of a disciple of Jesus. You must respond to God's choosing you as his beloved by growing in your desire and pursuit of these good and beautiful ways of living.

So ask yourself this: which of these might the Lord invite you to grow in? In what ways could you advance your character in Compassion, Kindness, Humility, Gentleness, Patience, Forgiveness, and Love? But please, as you consider this, please remember that it's not simply about getting better at a dictionary definition of a virtue. To pursue these things means to pursue them as they look in the life of Christ. We all must keep Jesus as our example, because he is the author and perfecter of our faith.

So to grow in character you'll have to first seek out Jesus. You'll have to pray, and keep on praying, and make it your habit to seek the Lord in that divine conversation. You'll have to go to the Scriptures to see for yourselves

who Jesus is and how he treated others. You'll have to spend time with the people of this church (like going to a pool party!). And you'll have to be willing to both ask for forgiveness when you've been wrong, and give it to others when they need it most.

None of that is easy. It probably won't come naturally to most of us. But the question I ask you this morning is: will you do this? Will you commit to being and becoming the kind of person Jesus expects you to be for the good of His church – this church?

**Paul has more to say about what it means to be members of Christ's community and pursue Christ's character, together.**

*15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.*

Peace in the body of Christ, in the church, must be our common goal. The peace of Christ is meant to rule, to be the decisive factor in all competing concerns and interests. And once again, Christ is our model. In Colossians 1:20 Paul told us that Jesus made peace THE ultimate reality and a present possibility through his blood, shed on the cross. This is not a peace that is **forced** or brought about by might. This is a peace **forged** through sacrifice. We have to be humble and willing to seek it out, even at great cost.

At this time I need to put some of what we've learned this morning into practice. In pursuit of all these virtues, in the spirit of love for all of you, and in the hope of repairing trust and pursuing peace, I'd like to clarify some things for you, my brothers and sisters at Faith.

A few weeks ago I posted some of my thoughts and feelings about the Supreme Court decision to reverse Roe v Wade to Facebook. I didn't do so lightly, as I know it is an extremely sensitive and divisive topic, deeply personal to many of you. What I wanted to do in that post was express my compassion and understanding to people who were confused and upset and even frightened by the decision and the changes it might trigger in our country in the weeks and months and years to come. I wanted people to know that as a Christian and even as a pastor that I cared about them, even if at the same I affirm and believe things like the sanctity of human life and the full personhood of the unborn. I agree with the statement that Pastor Brian and his wife Cindy read on July 22nd, crafted by our elders, intended to share and make clear the heart and beliefs of the leadership of our church. But I also felt the need to say something to those who feel alienated or even opposed to Christianity in light of the Roe v Wade decision, because I wanted them to know that Christians could have compassion and understanding for their anger and fear, even if we disagree about what caused those feelings.

In the days that followed the post going up, I learned that what I shared worried some of you who call Faith home. It confused some of you, and my lack of clarity in that post led to misunderstandings. And those misunderstandings **that I helped create** damaged the peace of our church.

**I want you to know that I am sorry for my lack of clarity and any confusion my post caused that led you to be troubled.**

I am more than willing to listen to your concerns and discuss what I wrote, if that will help you better understand what I'd hoped to accomplish. But I also hope that I can seek your forgiveness for the ways that I failed as a leader and a pastor and a brother in Christ.

I am called to peace with all of you, as you are called to peace with me. That **does not mean uniformity of thought** – we will all, always, find things we feel differently about and disagree over. But it does mean that if we have conflict which drives us apart, we commit to our mutual union with Christ to restore our fellowship. Please, if you feel that is something necessary between you and I, please let's pursue that together.

Not only is the peace of Christ to rule among us and characterize our community. Paul says the message of Christ, the Word of God, the Gospel of Good News, must be alive and active in all we do:

*16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.*

In all we teach, in all we say, in all we share, in all we think, in all we sing, in our worship of God and our relationships with one another...**let the message of Jesus be found, alive and well and flourishing.** And let it not be that we think of it as some overbearing list of rules or stuffy ancient words that we're forced to jam into our lives. The message of Christ is a gift. It is a blessing. We should be filled with joy and gratitude that our God demands we make our community a place of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and love. Do you realize how freeing it is that to follow Jesus means you can put to death anger and hatred and greed and spite and all the worldly things that tell you that you must be horrible to the person next to you in order to secure what you need for yourself? The message of Christ says "be free! Evil is overcome, the powers of this world are broken, and your assurance of salvation is secured, forever."

Put the message of Christ on your lips, y'all. Get your gratitude to God into your conversations, into your everyday stories, let it flow from you as naturally as talking about the weather or news or what silly thing your pets did the other day. I'm not saying you have to stop talking about all that. I'm saying **cultivate a desire to talk about MORE than that**, to teach about MORE than that, to sing about MORE than that. Go out today, this very day, and find someone to tell all about the coolest thing God has done for you lately. Or, if life is hard right now, tell someone about how even in the midst of your hardship God is there and He is Good.

Go let the message of Christ dwell among you, in you, around you, and through you richly. Bless one another and bless the world with the message you carry.

And finally,

*17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

This does not mean we do whatever we want, and just call it "Christian". To do all we do, whether in word or deed, in the name of the Lord Jesus means that the name and the commands and the character of Christ condition

all our actions, all our words, it influence and defines all we do, and that all the glory from what is done is given up and given over to God with gratitude.

This is a vision for what it means to be a church. This is what we all must desire for each other. ***Being members of Christ's community means being committed to pursuing Christ's character, together.***