



**Saint Luke Ev. Lutheran Church of
Watertown**
Sermon delivered by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
Christmas 1 December 28, 2008
Colossians 3:12-14

Therefore as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

Happy Festivus! You hear people say that more and more! Happy Festivus – a Festivus for the rest of us! Festivus was invented back in 1966 by a man named Daniel O'Keefe. It was a protest against the commercialization of Christmas. Festivus as you may know – is celebrated with a Festivus pole – an aluminum pole – which can be ordered from the Wagner Companies for \$39 plus S & H from Milwaukee. It's just a pole. Tinsel – it's said – is a distraction. Festivus is celebrated with a feast – a family dinner. At this dinner you observe one of the essential aspects of Festivus – the airing of grievances. Each person has time to talk about how other family members have disappointed you – failed you this past year. Then there is the "feats of strength" part. Family members wrestle with the daddy. This is all pretty silly – this Festivus stuff. But come to think about it – lots of the things people do to celebrate Christmas are pretty silly, too. There are reindeer that light up in my front yard – a moose a couple of doors down. People have little white lights like icicles hanging from their eve troughs. There are more cookies in my house right now than I can ever remember. We are having lots of pieces of very salty fish in pickle juice on crackers. Then there's this whole fruit cake thing! We put trees in our living room and presents under them. Do these presents help us remember God's first and greatest Christmas gift – his one and only Son our Savior?

This first Sunday after Christmas – in the warm afterglow of Christmas God's Word encourages us to live in the light of the Christmas Gospel. God's Word encourages us:

Love One Another for Jesus' sake!

- 1. Jesus' love changes our attitudes**
- 2. Jesus' love changes our actions**

The part of God's Word we are concentrating on is part of the Apostle Paul's letter to the believers in the city of Colossi. You might think you could read part of the Acts of the Apostles and find out about how the Apostle Paul went to the city of Colossi – to a synagogue on the Sabbath – where he read from maybe Isaiah or Jeremiah – and showed them how Jesus was the fulfillment of all the Scriptures had promised. But we aren't told that Paul ever went to Colossi. Paul did go to Ephesus. Colossi was a city about 100 maybe 125 miles east of Ephesus. Colossi was part of a triangle – Colossi, Heirapolis and Laodice – each about eleven or twelve miles apart. Colossi was in a river valley often plagued by earthquakes and volcanic eruptions! That would make you think about how breakable people are – how uncertain life is – how you needed to be ready at any moment – to meet your maker. Have lemons – make lemonade – the good news is – volcanic soil really makes things grow. Even sheep grew well there – sheep with soft thick black wool. There were chalky deposits in the river which worked well for making

dye for dyeing fabric. Add some important trade routes – some good roads and water ways and you were in a wonderful place for making money! But no matter how much money you make – there is still an emptiness – a place in your heart where something is missing – if you don't have Jesus. The LORD sent a humble and gentle and faithful man named Epaphras – to shepherd God's people there.

Wherever the Gospel is bearing the sweet fruits of faith – the devil is sure to attack. And so it seems that false teachers attacked the simple sweet truth of the Gospel. We might like the lies of the devil – the false teachings listed and explained but God knows better than to repeat his falsehoods. We can understand what the false teachings were – from the truths that Paul stressed – the dangers he warns against. There is horrible danger to our forever souls – in any false teaching that tries to bind us once again to Old Testament *ceremonial laws* – about everything clean and unclean – about circumcision, about what you can eat and can't eat. Danger in binding consciences to Old Testament *ceremonial* observations of *holy days*. There is danger in being superstitious! Oh, we say – I am not superstitious! Good! When you get married – it's ok to see the bride – before the service. When you were the bride you didn't wear something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue. When you play ball – you don't have lucky – I don't know – lucky socks, lucky hat, lucky bat, lucky charm of some sort – a lucky suit, lucky tie, lucky coin in your pocket? People in Colossi were all fascinated by the spirit world. People today spend literally millions of dollars to watch movies in high definition – from little boys who whisper “I see dead people” – to the undead who bite people in the neck at *Twilight!* There were people back then who liked to say, “I know something about God – you don't know!” There are people today who like to boast – “I have felt God more than you have felt him!” The best defense against false teaching – *half-truths* and deception – is to know the truth more and more. We need to read our Bible! The more we study God's Word – the harder it will be for anyone to trick or fool or mislead us! The more we study law and gospel the closer we will be to the Good Shepherd – who protects his sheep.

The verses just before the ones we are concentrating on are an encouragement to live our faith by putting away sinful hurtful attitudes by the power of the Gospel. **“But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips...”** It is sad that there are so many words for being upset! Life is full of frustrations. It's part of living in this sin infected world. My very first Church was on top of a hill on Pebble Creek Trail, Loves Park. It was the most beautiful address we ever had. There was a heart on our water tower. When it snowed – there was one drift on our whole property – right smack in front of the Church doors! You had to tunnel your way into church. What are you going to do – when you come to church – your white shirt and tie – your best coat and dress shoes – and there is this pile of snow? Spill your bulletins and sermons – and they blow away in the snow? Shovel snow until you are all sweated up? Do you get angry? Do you rage? Do you say bad words – while shoveling the Church out? *I don't think so!* The Holy Spirit makes you smarter than that! You might be surprised by that snow drift *once* – but not *twice!* If that's the best the devil has got – no amount of snow – is going to keep you out of God's house on a Sunday morning! **Anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language from your lips** have as their intent to do hurt and harm. When Jesus' forgiving love fills your heart – we will do better and better at resisting the temptation to get angry!

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. God chose you. He picked you and me. He loves us! I know Jesus loves me. He shows me in countless ways. Like the other day I was driving home from Fort Atkinson Saturday night – in the dark – in the blowing and drifting

snow. It was not good. Well, Jesus saw my trouble. So what did he do? He sent a snow plow – a huge orange plow – with a blade and a wing – and this thing that spreads salt behind. This plow was far enough ahead – that it wasn't spraying me with sand or salt – just clearing the road – nice and clean and safe – all the way from Jefferson to Johnson's Creek. How wonderful was that? It was a very small thing – for the Creator of Heaven and earth – to send one truck to clear away a couple of inches of fluffy snow – so I could get home! It was a very small thing – for the one who scraped away all my sins – to scrape away a little snow, too! I tell you about it – because this is just one of the countless things that Jesus does every day to help us – because he loves us so much! He always did and he always will!

The Holy Spirit makes us strong to show **compassion!** **Compassion** is a tender heart that cares for people – especially people in pain or distress. We were at UW Hospital in Madison the other day. While Nancy was having a blood draw – I sat by the entrance. For a while I watched the people coming in. There was a young man in a kind of wheel-chair bed. He was all bundled up. His body was kind of bundled up. Do you know what I mean? He really smiled at me. I think he thought my furry hat – with the ear covers that stick out on the sides – looked funny. Maybe he felt sorry for me? I watched people come into the hospital – in pain because of the cold. I watched people who walked very slowly – like the bottoms of their feet – like every step hurt. I watched people walk in – with masks on – because of the cold air – and because they were immune suppressed – and any bug – any germ – any virus – and there are lots of all of the above in a hospital could in their weakened state be fatal. I watched people come into the hospital – their skin discolored – because something was painfully wrong on the inside! There are people who have spent weeks, months, years, a lifetime – with terrible physical troubles. I have never ever spent one night in the hospital as a patient. Compassion is to feel the pain of others – to pray for them – and to thank Jesus every day for the priceless blessing of good health. To long for the day when we are all in heaven where no one will ever be sick again!

As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility... Humility has its roots in understanding the greatness of God.

Apparently – next to some nativity scenes – people who hate God have taken to putting up signs that say very simply – black ink on white – “**At this season of winter solstice—may reason prevail. There are no gods, no devils, no angels nor hell. There is only our natural world. Religion is but myth and superstition that hardens hearts and enslaves minds!**” It is simple blasphemy to deny the existence of God – the Creator who set the sun at the center of the solar system – the earth on its axis of ___° spinning around the sun – so that we have the four seasons. It is foolishness to believe that the whole creation – has no architect, no builder, no ultimate purpose or meaning! It is the devil's lie that God's Word is but myth and superstition. The Christmas Gospel gives new life to hearts dead in trespasses and sins. It is the Christmas Gospel – God's Word – God's Truth that sets us eternally free! Those who want freedom from religion can do their worst. But if they want to be free from Jesus' forgiving love – they will suffer the eternal consequences – in the flaming lake of sulfur – without even a drop of water to cool their tongue!

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. At Christmas time – it's nice to go to stores to buy gifts – physical tokens of the love you have for people in your life! It's hard – though – to show great love, gentleness and patience for the other people who are shopping, too. I was waiting in line to check out the other day – when a person two ahead of me said to the check out lady – I don't think my quilt rang up for the right price! And I'm not one to roll my eyes – but I thought inside – here we go again! You know what's going to happen! The check out lady – who isn't

going anywhere for the next three hour anyway says, "Are you sure?" "Yes, I am!" says the customer. "I'll have to check", says the check out lady – and picks up the phone. "Somebody – anybody out there in the wilderness – price check!" At stake is the enormous sum of \$1.38. We wait and wait – what kind of quilt? What did the sign say? Sure enough – the smaller price was for quilts with goose feathers – these are extra soft goose feathers. "Oh, well!" says the customer who made all the rest of us wait for nothing! She wasted our valuable time for nothing. It's hard not to be impatient – frustrated with bad drivers, bad service, expensive food at a restaurant that's cold or fast food – where they still can't line up the bun, the fish, the cheese, enough tartar sauce for five sandwiches and the top bun! It is only when Jesus' forgiving love fills your heart that we will not *pretend to be patient*. *We will be patient*. We will bundle up a very good attitude with the love and patience Jesus has shown us. Then it won't be just a sweet wish – but a reality – we will feel like Christmas all year long for Jesus' sake.

God alone all glory!

Rev. Anthony E. Schulla