

Jesus is Lord!
"Easter in November!"
November 22, 2020

Overarching theme: In 2020, FUMC will be a **GO** church!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

The past is the past. There is nothing that can be done about it. The past can only be used to gain wisdom for the future. What can change is the future. When we, as God's people, are willing to follow God in our daily lives, God will make a good way in the future. The way may be bumpy at times and have curves, but the process will be filled with God's love and grace.

Colossians:

Most important for understanding Colossians are the circumstances to which Paul's responding. Colossians 2:8-23 indicates that the Colossians are facing temptation to turn to distinctively Jewish practices, such as circumcision (Col 2:11), food laws (Col 2:16), and Sabbath keeping (Col 2:16). Some scholars propose that these verses suggest a form of early Jewish Gnosticism. Gnosticism is a religion that seeks special knowledge in order to escape from this corrupt world. However, the material in Colossians 2 is better explained by the potential appeal of Judaism to non-Jewish converts to Christianity.

Throughout, the letter demonstrates that Christ is better than all alternative means of salvation. It insists that Christ is enough for salvation: no additional knowledge or special Jewish practices are needed. Christ created the universe and set it free from hostile powers. His story shapes the story of the world and of all the people in it. Those who wish to know the great secret of how God will restore the world need only listen to the openly declared gospel of Christ (Col 2:2). The future hope for the whole universe (Col 1:20), and everyone in it (Col 1:27-28), is known in Christ. Freedom from enslaving powers (Col 1:16) and transformed lives that please God (Col 3:1-17) are known only in Christ. The death and resurrection of Christ decide the fate of the universe.

- adapted from the CEB study bible, pp 381-382 (NT)

Reflect on these Scriptures:

Colossians 3: 12-17 NRSV ¹² *As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.* ¹³ *Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord^[a] has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.* ¹⁴ *Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.* ¹⁵ *And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.* ¹⁶ *Let the word of Christ^[b] dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.^[c]* ¹⁷ *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.*

Commentary:

Colossians 3: 12-17 begins by focusing on the qualities of our interpersonal relationships as the baptized people of God. We are to discard the old clothing of the past and put on the new garments of resurrection living (compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, love, etc).

That said, the life of the Christian community living in the world as the bridgehead of the new humanity is to be distinguished not only by the quality of its interpersonal relationships but also by the quality of its worship. For Colossians, what is central is the work of Christ, the gospel, to which worship is the response. The focus is on its spoken proclamation, as attested by the mention of teaching and admonition that follows. By extension, we can see the centrality of the work of Christ maintained through Scripture, of which Colossians itself is now a part, and through the sacraments, which are at least 'visible' words.

What is particularly telling is the relationship set out between the gospel and the community, as the readers are told to "*let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.*" This suggests that the purpose of the focus on gospel proclamation is the formation and shaping of the community to embody the word of Christ in its witness in the world.

In the community's worship, psalms hymns, and spiritual songs have a twofold function. On the one hand, they play a part in the community's being formed by the word of Christ. If Col 1:15-20 was originally part of such hymnody, then the letter itself is the writer's attempt to allow that particular word about Christ to do its job. On the other hand, such songs are an offering of praise to God. Praise is the appropriate response to the good news of God's actions in Christ; it is an indication that grace has had its liberating effect, moving us from preoccupation with ourselves to the worship of God that constitutes what it is to be truly human. Far

from leading simply to a passive acceptance of the status quo, the thankfulness that underlies such praise is also the motivation that ensures that the worshipping community brings to bear the lordship of Christ in every aspect of its life in the world (3:17).

- adapted from the *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, XI, 650-51.*

This week – Easter in November.

Scholars see in Colossians 3 Easter baptismal language -that believers are raised with Christ from the waters of baptism - *So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God* (Colossians 3: 1-4 NRSV). In the early days of Christianity, new believers were often baptized at the midnight Easter Vigil after the preparation season of what would come to be known as Lent. They would discard the clothes of the past, and then, after baptism, emerge from the waters clothed with a new Easter garment – often a white robe. Colossians 3:9b -10 employs a clothing metaphor in this way *"you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed in the knowledge in the image of its Creator."* In summary, Colossian 3 calls us to go through the closets of our lives, metaphorically speaking, and discard those 'ugly sweaters' that are unfit for resurrection living.

Ugly Sweater # 1 – IDOLATRY. v. 5 – Idolatry of two kinds: *Porneia* and greed (*porneia* -the Greek term the word "pornography" is derived from). *Porneia* is when we objectify a person, when we make an idol (goddess or god) out of a mortal, for our own gratification. Greed is when we make an idol out of money/material things. Idolatry can take over our lives – so we discard the ugly sweater of IDOLATRY in all of its forms!

Ugly Sweater # 2 – UNWELCOME WORDS - v. 8-9 – *slander, abusive language, and lying* that come from a selfish or angry heart. Today, 75% of Americans surveyed claim that our lack of civility is a huge problem. Christians are called to be people of the truth in what has been called a post-truth world, letting go of abusive speech, slander and lies. We discard the ugly sweater of UNWELCOME WORDS!

Ugly Sweater # 3 v. 11 – *no Gentile/Jew, Barbarian/Scythian, slave/free, woman/man*. This verse reminds us - there is no room for a sense of superiority in terms of race/class/gender (Gal 3:28). There is no room for racism, classism, sexism – Colossians 3:11 calls us to discard these ugly sweaters!

So then, remembering our Easter baptismal identity – being raised with Christ - what are we to cloth ourselves with? One of the practices of the early Christians, as

they came out of the waters of baptism, was to cry out "*Abba!*" the Aramaic term Jesus gave us for God. This was their way of claiming their new relationship with the God who called them his very own beloved daughter/son. Colossians 3:12 begins with this reminder of our fundamental identity as God's chosen, beloved children. And from that overflow of love, we then are to cloth ourselves with the new garments of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness (gentleness) and patience. All of these garments have a transforming effect on community.

And then Colossians 3 offers two commands (imperative grammar in the Greek):

Bear with one another

Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you.

As if to say that there can be no real community, no long term relationships without the practice of forgiveness.

And above all, put on God's *agape* love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. In the heart, let these rule – the Peace of Christ. Much more than the Pax Romana ruling over us, we need the Peace of Christ ruling in us. All of these together build up a community clothed in the message of Christ through psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, sung to God in the overflow of gratitude. Doing all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

This is a journey – we're not there yet – for we are *work in progress* people. But the clothing metaphor is particularly apropos here. We tend to put on clothes every day. Clothing ourselves is a continual practice.

Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:

As you think about this passage, how can you respond to this Scripture?

1. Of all the ugly sweaters described in the message, what is one that you particularly need to discard?
2. Of the following Easter clothing list, what do you need most to put on?
Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, love, peace of Christ, gratitude?
3. Clothing oneself tends to be a daily task. What is a good way to remind yourself of your daily need for the Easter clothing mentioned above?
4. Verses 15-17 mention giving thanks, thankfulness and gratitude. Why do you think Paul is so repetitive about this topic? Using a 1-10 scale regarding your current level of gratitude (1 – very thankful; 10- ingrate) where are you right now?
5. Brainstorm blessings that you are grateful for with your family or group. Try to think outside the box. Close in prayer, giving thanks for each.

Activity for the life of a disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMC.
2. Ponder and pray on this Scripture this week: Colossians 3: 12-14 NRSV ¹² *As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord^[a] has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*
3. Reflect on the Scripture above as you get dressed this week. Think about the 'Easter' clothes that Christ invites you to put on each day.