

19 June 2022 Galatians 3:23-29 Second Sunday after Pentecost; Pastor Fraser Pearce

Today Martin Sydney Jericho has been adopted
As a child of God through holy baptism here at Bethlehem.
One of the customs observed at his baptism
Was wearing a special baptismal garment,
One, in fact, that has been in the family
For over 100 years.
The baptismal robe, like lighting a candle to mark the baptism,
Is not an essential part of the rite,
But a good custom observed by many people
In different Christian traditions.
In our Lutheran Church Rites book
There is a commentary on the rite of baptism that,
After discussing the history and symbolism of the baptismal robe,
Includes these words: ***Of course, the sacrament itself, and not the symbolic garment, clothes a person with the righteousness of Christ.***
The sacrament itself – that is, holy baptism –
And *not* the symbolic garment - the baptismal robe –
Clothes a person with the righteousness of Christ.

In other words the baptismal robe serves as a reminder
Of the reality that happens in holy baptism:
That as we are washed with water in the name of the Triune God,
We are indeed clothed with Christ,
And that his righteousness becomes ours,
So that we may live together as God's holy people.

Today in this sermon I'll proclaim from God's word
That since in baptism we are clothed in Christ,
We have a unity given to us by God that cannot be broken
By any worldly markers of division.
More than this, I'll share the good news
That since we are clothed in Christ by God's grace,
And since we can trust that all that is Christ's is ours,
We are free to live a new and harmonious way of living
That flows from God's love for us,
And that brings glory to God.

Let's listen to how today's reading from Galatians concludes: **As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.**

Now there's a lot going on in these brief verses.
To get the picture we need to pause
And get an understanding of the problem that St Paul is addressing
In the Galatian Christian churches.

In a nutshell the problem is this:

Some were saying that to be truly part of God's community,
To be a true descendent of Abraham,
Meant keeping the laws of the God's Old Covenant people,
Including the law about circumcision.

It's a bit like this:

Coming to faith and Christ is well and good,
But to be *truly* a part of the offspring of Abraham
Means keeping the rules of the Abrahamic household.

So: Keep the rules,

(And in the letter to the Galatians the specific rule that's mentioned
Is the rule that the males be circumcised),

Keep the rules, and your part of the family.

Now in the letter to the Galatians St Paul

Spells out with great force and clarity

That we do not become heirs of the Father by keeping the rules,

But by hearing and trusting the Good News about Jesus.

This is how St Paul puts it in Galatians 2: **We know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.**

In other words, we become members of God's household

By putting our trust in Christ:

He is the true Son of God, *he* is the true descendent of Abraham,

And as we trust in *him*, we share in *his status*,

We can stand before God knowing that we truly belong,

Not because we have kept the laws of the household –

No one can become a member of the household by keeping the rules –

But because all that is Christ's is ours.

Now for St Paul this sharing all that is Christ's is not some idea

Or some concept, but a reality and a power that we participate in

By receiving the gift of holy baptism:

As we were baptised into Christ,

We were *clothed* with him:

No matter what our ethnic background: Jew or Greek or whatever,

When we were baptised, *we were clothed with Christ*.

No matter what our social or economic status:

Slave or free or whatever, when we were baptised,

We were clothed with Christ.

And no matter what our sex or gender identity: male or female

Or, we could say, eunuch or whatever,

When we were baptised, *we were clothed in Christ*:

All that is *his* is *ours*,

And this gives us a fundamental unity that is stronger

Than any distinctions in the world or the Christian community.

It means we belong together, and that we belong to God.
We are the one household of faith,
Given a new shape of life by our loving heavenly Father.

Of course, this unity does not mean
That the ethnic, socio-economic, or gender distinctions
That exist in the Christian community have no significance:
On the contrary, just as the distinction between Father, Son,
And Holy Spirit reveal to us that the one God
Is a community of love,
So the distinctions that exist in the Christian community,
Including the God-given distinction between male and female,
Provide opportunities for God's love to be revealed
In our life together.

One way we can think about this
Is by receiving the teaching that St Paul gives in Colossians
About what it means to put on Christ,
About what it means to live out the baptismal life
In the day to day existence of Christian community.
Listen to what St Paul writes in Colossians 3: **As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with 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.** Colossians 3:12-15

This is a wonderfully rich and encouraging passage,
Well worth coming back to and meditating on,
As we think about the way of life God has called us to,
And the way of life God is giving us as his people.

In the last part of this sermon let's take three aspects
Of what it means to be clothed with Christ,
To live out the reality of our baptism,
Three aspects that were mentioned in the prayer
We prayed for Martin after he was baptised.
I'll remind you of the prayer: *Holy Father, renew Martin daily with your Holy Spirit, and fill him with your kindness, compassion, and love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

So: Kindness, compassion, and love.
How might we clothe ourselves with kindness?
Well, it can be as simple as learning each other's names.
We have all, no doubt, experienced cruelty,
When people have treated us like *things* rather than human beings,
When they have not even bothered to find out what we are called.
As Christians we can show kindness as we learn each other's names,
The names that were given to us in our baptism.
It's a simple but powerful thing to learn each other's names,

Even if it takes us a little while and perhaps some embarrassment
As we cope with forgetting and remembering again.
And it's simple and powerful
When we then pray for each other by name.

How might we clothe ourselves with compassion?
Well, we show compassion when we take the time and effort
To put ourselves in the shoes of other people,
When we share in their path of life, in their sufferings.
As a rule we find it very difficult to imagine what it's like
To be someone else:
To be a of a different ethnicity, or socio-economic class
Or gender: but we can show compassion by the simple act of listening.
In the simple but powerful act of listening to people
Who are different from us,
Whom *God* has made different from us.
As we listen, we start to put ourselves in their shoes,
And we grow in our ability wisely to pray to God for them.

And how might we clothe ourselves with love?
Well one simple way that Luther recommends in the Small Catechism,
Is when we wake up, to make the sign of the cross on ourselves:
To remember that we are baptised into,
That we are clothed with, the one who showed what love is
As he gave his life on the cross for us.
As we receive the love of God, the self-sacrificial love of Christ,
Even in the simple act of making the sign of the cross,
We can go into our day,
Whatever our ethnic background,
Whatever socio-economic class,
Whatever our gender,
Being free to show love in acts of service to our neighbour.

Dear friends in Christ,
In our baptism we have a unity given to us as a gift,
And we have a new way of life that we can share together.
So let's place our trust, let's seek our identity,
Not in the things that divide us,
- Even the God-given distinctions in the human community,
And also in the church –
Let's place our trust in, let's seek our identity in Christ Jesus,
Who loved us, who gave his life for us,
Who knows us by name,
Who listens to our prayers,
And who lives and intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father.
In Jesus' name. Amen.