

Third Sunday of Lent

Colossians 3:12-17; John 4:1-15, 27-30

“What Christians Wear”

This sermon as preached by Pastor Jim Page at Trinity Lutheran Church in Eau Claire, WI.

Many of you are aware that it is March Madness in college basketball; the NCAA tournament is in full swing. Basketball games abound on television and with that, we also see some unique fan attire. This is true in an array of sports... fans showing their support in unique ways by what they wear. Since whenever someone follows something or someone, you can tell who or what they are following by what they wear.

I have a few images to show you, see if you can guess who the fan is supporting:

[slide with photos of: Packer fan, Wisconsin Badgers, Brazil soccer fans]

What's true in sports is also true in religion. See if you can guess what religion these people are following:

[slide with photo of: Muslim woman, Buddhist monks]

How about what people wear as Christians:

[slide with photo of: man wearing a multi-colored wig and a t-shirt stating 'John 3:16'; three adults holding picket signs that read 'God hates you'].

God hates you. That's great. What a ridiculous message that couldn't be any farther from that of Christ. The central message of Jesus' life and ministry was to bring everyone together in following him by living out this phrase: Love one another as I have loved you. How do we follow Christ in living out this statement? It's about what you wear and the scripture readings today give us some guidance.

We're in John chapter 4 at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Jesus is in Judea and decides to head north to return to Galilee. John inserts a single statement that would've caused the first hearers of this story to gasp; eyes wide open in shock. "But he had to go through Samaria." These seven words is the foundation of this remarkable story.

People who lived in Samaria were called Samaritans and they had a long, deep dispute with the Jewish people. What were they disputing over? Religion! Imagine that-people arguing about religion. Some things never change. The Jewish people believed the central place to worship God was the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. The Samaritans thought otherwise so they built a shrine on Mt. Gerizim which they believed was the central place to worship. That shrine was then destroyed by Jewish troops in 128 BCE but the schism continued.

For John to say, "But he had to go through Samaria" meant that Jesus was going through enemy territory.

Not only that, Jesus is sitting by a well, he talks to not just anybody. He talks to a Samaritan woman. Women in ancient culture had no power, they were a commodity not worthy of any respect or recognition especially

from a man from the enemy people. Her name isn't even mentioned.

Jesus is talking about water. All of us know of the importance of water but in our time, clean water is everywhere. Back then, water was not prominent and it was precious as gold. Getting water likely required a laborious journey in the hot sun. In his conversation with her, Jesus says, "...those who drink of the water that I will give will never be thirsty." He's teaching about himself and that he has something for her and for all people. The woman believes he is a prophet, even the Messiah.

As they are talking, the disciples come on the scene and watch what is going on. John writes, "They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'Why are you speaking with her?'" Why are you talking to her? Do you know where she's from? She's not one of us! She could've told others and they could have beat you.

Religion has been used to maintain a status quo of boundaries between people: those who are 'right' or 'wrong' and as an excuse to mistreat people.

Religion was used as a guide for race relations in our country. Racial purity as interpreted in scripture was at the ideological heart of Hitler's Germany; ethnic and religious wars have devastated the Middle East, Africa and others parts of the world.

The central tenet of all religion is always toward rule keeping rather than relationship building. Why? Because a person is in control with rules. I can apologize for this, I did this which was good, I asked God for forgiveness then, and as long as God and I are on good terms...I can still hate you as long as I love God. All religion can be focused on tradition, ritual and rules which are fine until they replace the key priority of treating people well. Some of you have been mistreated in the name of religion; some in the name of Jesus. People say, "Our church teaches, Jesus said, the Bible says" and you were rejected in the name of Jesus who died for you. Some of the meanest people I have crossed paths have thought they knew everything about scripture! I don't think Jesus is fond of his followers mis-treating those he died for.

In this story, Jesus sees his followers look at the Samaritan woman in disgust; thinking to themselves, "As long as we follow Jesus, we don't care about you." The stamp on your life as a disciple, a follower of Jesus is not holding to a certain teaching, or saying you were to this many Bible classes or you think your better in the eyes of God compared to someone else. The key piece is how you treat people.

It was that message of treating people well that was one of the greatest challenges for the followers of Jesus in an ancient culture marked by divisions among people. A man named Saul, was the greatest persecutor of Christians saying their message was destructive and divisive. That man had a unique encounter with God on a road to Damascus, many of you know the story, and from that moment, he devoted his life to spreading the gospel. He wrote most of what is in the New Testament. He endured hunger pains, beatings, being imprisoned and mocked for his message of love for all.

While in prison in Rome near the end of his life, he wrote a letter to Christians the small town of Colossae. In this section for today, Paul talks about how Christians are to treat others and it's all in what we wear.

“As God's chosen ones, clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience; forgive each other just as the Lord has forgiven you. Above all, clothe yourselves with love with binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

These qualities are what we are to wear; they are what people see. How do we do this?

Before I share this final thing with you...let me first say it's cheesy. So, before you see it, just say “That's lame” so then you don't need to see it after I share it with you. On the count of 3...says: That's cheesy.

Chick Flick PG

Compassion-this is when you love someone to the point that you know how they are feeling. We say ‘I love you with all my heart’. In ancient times, to reflect this love you'd say, “I love you with all my bowels.”

Humility-putting others needs and feelings above your own.

Kindness-you loan your strength to someone else.

Forgiveness-That's pretty straight-forward but hard to do when someone ticks you off.

Love-Jesus said to do it

Kindness-in case you forgot it the first time.

Patience-move at the pace of the person you care about. How often we say to each other ‘hurry up, get moving!’

Gentleness-relate to others at their level, not out of strength or status; ‘my relationship with you is more important than you being impressed by me.’

Chick Flick PG...it's lame; you may not take it seriously. What leads us to take it seriously is the person who wrote it...Paul who was beaten, shipwrecked, imprisoned and killed for the gospel. And the person who 2,000 years ago modeled it by first talking to a woman at a well and who ended up dying on a cross out of an unwavering love for you and the world. We are and need to continue to wear these qualities to make a positive difference in our homes, our marriages, in the lives of children, where we work and our culture. It's true, what you wear reflects who you follow. Amen.

