Oak Grove Presbyterian Church
Rev. Dr. Bart Roush
October 18, 2026
Colossians 3:12–17

Let us pray for an awareness of and inspiration from the Holy Spirit.

Calm us now, O God, into a quietness that heals and listens. By your Spirit, open our hearts to the balm of your Word. Speak to us in clear tones so that we might feel our spirits leap for joy, increase with hope, and expand with thanksgiving as your resurrection witnesses. Amen.

> 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 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* 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. [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.

In the reading from Colossians, the author of the letter, Paul, is writing to the church and uses the metaphor of putting on new clothes. In doing so, the person who has donned new garments has put away an old life and has been renovated, or made over if you will, by the knowledge of Jesus.

It seems fitting on this day, when we have just celebrated Leighton's baptism, to hear these words of Paul to the Colossian church. The image of putting on new clothes is derived from an early church baptismal formula. These are likely familiar words to many of the early church, likely having heard them at their own baptisms. They are said as part of the baptismal rite to give meaning to baptism for the common life of the community. A person sheds the old life and puts on the new life in Christ.

In the early church, candidates for baptism would study over a period of time, often for many months or even years, they would come forward for baptism and remove their clothes entering into the water naked, they would then be baptized and as they came out of the water they would put on a white robe. The Eastern Orthodox church still practices in this manner with infants, and many Christian denominations will clothe people in white robes, or you will see white clothes worn for a baptism.

Paul lists five character traits that make up the clothing of the Christian life: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.[i]

When we begin to get dressed, we first put on our undergarments. The old-fashioned term for them is, "foundation garments." When Paul talks about compassion and humility, he is talking about the foundation garments of life, because those character traits are fundamental to human relationships. They summarize how we feel deep down inside about each other and about ourselves.

Putting on compassion means that we feel with each other. Compassion is a "tenderness of heart." I've talked about this a few years back, probably more than once, because the Greek word for compassion is one of my favorites; *splanchna*. It the visceral compassion that is used when the deep feelings God has for us are mentioned. It is the powerful emotions that come deep from within, from the gut.

Specifically, it is the deep feeling about someone's misfortune or difficulty. It's the feeling Jesus has before he heals people. The feeling he has before he feeds the multitudes. This is the deep feeling the father has when he sees the prodigal son return when he thought he had lost him forever.

One of the articulate values of Oak Grove is Compassion. We describe the value of Compassion this way, "Our faith calls us toward empathy and to care for people of the world. We view all people as children of God. We consider the suffering and misfortune of others and take action to alleviate that suffering."

When you're compassionate, you're not running away from suffering and you're not pretending the suffering doesn't exist. Like most of discipleship, compassion is intentional. It isn't spontaneous. It needs to be practiced. Compassion must be deliberate. It must be "Put on" as a garment of Christ.

The other foundational garment is humility. Humility is how we feel about ourselves, not negative feelings about ourselves, but a lack of focus on ourselves. Humility will keep us from insisting on our own way, our own rights, our own agenda. Without compassion and humility, human relationships don't work.

Next, Paul calls us to put on the basic work-clothes of the Christian life, kindness and gentleness. Those are the jeans and sweatshirts we wear in the everyday world. Kindness means, at least, to be courteous and considerate of other people. It doesn't seem to be a very fancy thing, but it seems in shorter supply these days, and I strongly believe simple human kindness will go a long way to do more to demonstrate the life-changing work of Christ than almost anything else.

Kindness can be seen in the goodness that is for the well-being of others. One writer comments that, "The writers of scripture defined kindness as the virtue of the person whose neighbor's good is as dear as his own."[ii] In every Psalm where the King James Version refers to the "kindness" of God, the Revised Standard Version translates it as "steadfast love."

We put on meekness, another word for gentleness, because we are all so fragile that we need gentle treatment. In a violent world, the children of God must wear gentleness like old worn-out jeans.

Then, each day we must put on our shoes of patience. The world is filled with problems, but problems become splits, divisions, and warfare when we run out of patience with the problem. So, Paul says, put on the shoes of patience and keep walking with each other, even when it feels like an endurance race. And just because we humans can be messy, even amongst the ones with good intentions, we need to carry a full pocket of forgiveness.

The final article of clothing Paul mentions is the overcoat of love; "and over all these virtues put on love, which binds them together in perfect unity." Indeed, we can't and won't put on any of the other articles of Christian clothing without love.

Once we are clothed with these things, once we have the intentional practice of these attributes, Colossians instructs us, "with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God." When we practice compassion, humility, kindness, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and love the only response is gratitude and to sing. In turn, when we can orient our hearts toward gratitude, it allows us to better practice acts of compassion, humility, kindness, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and love. Those acts fuel thankfulness and an attitude and orientation of thankfulness fuel those acts. One is an inner reality and

orientation, the others outwards manifestations and actions of that inner orientation of gratitude.

I think it's a helpful reminder at this point to remember that this letter from Paul is addressed to the community. This encouragement to put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and above all, love isn't just about individual piety. It isn't just about your prayer life. It is about how we engage with one another in community and how we build a life that is beneficial to all. The "you" is plural, it almost always is. It's about the whole community and how we show up for one another.

Friends, it has been a rough few weeks, and months, on top of some already rough few years. I said one day this week, commiserating with another person about the various struggles and challenges we both had faced, "yesterday was a hard week." We have seen evidence these past few weeks of something other than compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and love. It seems we have been barraged daily by a lack of dignity, decency, and humanity and a lack of compassion.

There was the horrific news of Jane Doe's assault at Cornell University and the fact that over 50 men were aware of what was going on and not one took action to stop it. Following that, there have been other reports of similar attacks at the University of Chicago and the University of Arizona.

There was the scheduled, and then eventually cancelled, livestreaming of a execution by firing squad of Nidal Hassan. The former Army Major was the perpetrator of a mass shooting at Fort Hood that killed 13 people and injured dozens more. When the planned public execution was announced, there were many who condemned the plan, including the Presbyterian Church. In the statement from the Presbyterian church, it recognized the horrors of the crime, and remembered the victims and their loved ones, but also condemned the brutality of a public execution.

The statement said, “We believe our nation desperately needs healing, not another occasion to normalize violence. True justice honors victims and upholds human dignity.”[iii]

And, in an all-too-familiar occurrence, there was another mass shooting at an elementary school in Bend, Oregon this week. three students and a teacher where killed, and others were injured.

Closer to home, there is the dangerous rhetoric against our Somali and Muslim neighbors, including the unprecedented search of Representative Omar’s home. Many of you have shown up the last couple of Fridays at noon at the mosque, while our Somali Muslim neighbors are in prayer, to show solidarity and love and to exhibit that hate has no place here in Minnesota.

There also continues to be hateful rhetoric and outright lights about transgender people who are being used to score cheap political points. And earlier this week the vice-president used being gay as a joke. All of this does harm to real people, people we know and love.

Earlier, as we were baptizing Leighton, we all made promises and vows. One of those promises was that we would work to make Leighton’s world a healthy place, to make her schools good, her streets safe, the laws of the country just and equal, to make peace in her world.

In the previous two weeks, both Karen Diller and Emily Lassiter shared the importance of Oak Grove Presbyterian church to their families. Each of them named specific times, instances, and people that have cared for them, their families, and the wider community.

There is a saying that the opposite of love is not hate. But the opposite of love is indifference. At Oak Grove, we are not indifferent to the suffering of others. Together we care. Together we show compassion.

When we foster a caring community toward one another something remarkable happens, we actually see God at work.

We see it when we make promises to help parents raise a child, to work for good schools, safe streets, and for the freedom for them to grow into who they are meant to be. We see it when we celebrate our seniors at the Golden Harvest dinner. We see it when we show up at the mosque to show support and love to our Muslim neighbors. We show it when we fiercely defend our transgender and gay and lesbian siblings to be able to be who they fully are. We see it when we mail a card, make a phone call, or send a short text checking in with someone to make sure they are okay. We see it when we pray and sing together in worship. We see it in any number of ways.

When we are doing these things, when we are acting in these loving ways, what we really are doing is this: we are practicing at being Christ to each other. We are choosing to put on the love of Christ. You are choosing to practice the gracious forgiveness of Jesus. We are choosing with each day, to grow into being the people who God calls us to be. If we are able to care for one another, then we are able to care for the rest of the world as well.

When we are loving to those that are closest to us it is then when we have the opportunity to see Christ in the other and to be Christ for the other. To see Christ, and to be Christ. Our hope is that the more we do this, the more we love those close to us that our practice of loving one another flows out into our practice of loving others in the world: loving friends and neighbors, family, patients, co-workers. Loving others as Christ loved us, because in your everyday living, you have clothed yourselves with Christ.

We need more of this in the coming days, weeks, and years… We need this… And, honestly, we have always needed this. I am convinced that an imperfect, committed, connected and caring community of faith can change the world. Together we care.

The church can be and is the place where we can continually see the incarnation of God. It is where we may create a mutually dependent community where we support, lift up, affirm, and hold one another accountable. It is about claiming our identity in Christ. It's about recognizing that we are God's chosen, holy, beloved and forgiven people and that in gratitude we should put on the garments of Christian grace and clothe ourselves in compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience showing forth the love and peace of Jesus Christ, in whatever we do, in word or deed. Because, honestly, I don't know how you can make it through this world any other way except for doing this very thing together.

Amen.

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[i] https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/first-sunday-of-christmas-3/commentary-on-colossians-312-17-5

[ii] Maxie D. Dunnam, "The Preacher's Commentary – Vol. 31: Galatians/Ephesians/Philippians/Colossians/Philemon

[iii] https://pcusa.org/news-storytelling/news/2026/10/13/statement-planned-livestreaming-execution?fbclid=IwY2xjawU7kWxleHRuA2FlbQIxMQBwZG9mAXNydGMGYXBwX2lkEDIyMjAzOTE3ODgyMDA4OTIAAR5twI47Z30rQGGcdoTy9pdt1RM1sp5mLvLY-GY_FqM1YQlTOuJIy0-25LMtUA_aem_2HaCaQQz63LtnpK-AAhkHQ