

Christmas C-1, 2006

December 31, 2006

Colossians 3: 12-17

Title: Five Virtues for the New Year

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a fair amount of advice available now. You don't simply have to go to the newspaper advice column anymore. It's available on line. Go to a search engine type in what you need and there is multiple, unending wisdom.

And it multiplies this time of year. Here's a taste.

- Should the Avian flu come our way prepare for a quarantine. Good advice---have food supplies for 14 days.
- Eat only at meal time. Good advice—someone has measured that the average holiday weight gain is 4 _ pounds
- Be grateful for every present. Good advice—If you are going to re-gift, keep a record.
- Keep your new year's resolutions manageable. Good advice—resolutions beyond a couple are usually self-defeating.

In six short verses in Colossians 3 comes some of the most profound life advice imaginable. What's so stunning about this advice is that it's both universal and specific. You can apply it most everywhere.

Talk about life application. Here it is.

Just take that list of 5 virtues for those like us called into this Life to follow Jesus:

Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness meaning
Quiet strength, and patience meaning discipline
And I'll give you my 2003 Ford Taurus if you
Can think of any area of life where these values
Have no place.

In these 6 crisp verses Paul gives a summary of a full life in Christ.
Basic questions are asked: Who are we? Chosen, holy and beloved!

Our identity is a gift.

How are we to live in this world? As did our
Lord Jesus—bearing with each other;

Forgiving, in peace and thanksgiving, with the word of Christ
Dwelling in you richly, teaching and admonishing, gratitude,
Singing.....

And listen to this:

Whatever you do, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.

There it is. What an audacious like plan this is. That you and I can be so formed, so grounded, so dressed, so centered in Christ that what we do, We see it as issuing from our life in Christ.

Ponder that----what about me isn't clothed in Christ? What must I take off for Christ's peace to rule in my heart?

My spending habits showing patience?

My attitude toward those with whom I don't agree demonstrating kindness?

My willingness to accept and

Tolerate behaviors that divide and diminish evidencing compassion?

My living by hearsay rather than seeking the truth bearing meekness?

My tendency to puff myself up far from humility?

Such a list could be debilitating, can lead to despairing!

Should that come your way remember that you are named beloved! That Christ has come to you, gracious and merciful!

Whatever you do, do in the name of Jesus Christ.

Paul is not pollyannish about what can divert us from living our identity. But neither is he willing to give in to it.

Because God has raised Jesus from the dead,

We can be clothed in his resurrection life.

While sitting in my niece's car one day, I picked up her Business ID. There she was complete with employee number. On the back of that card was her company's listing of 2007 Goals.

It was a far reaching and impressive list.

Is this attainable? I asked her. It may be a stretch, but that

Doesn't mean we can't aspire to it.

This may be a stretch, but that doesn't mean we can't aspire to it. As children of the living God we are to become what we are—chosen, Holy, beloved.

When I was coming along there was must talk about Proteus. Proteus in Greek mythology was a sea God, who when grasped Changed, took on different shapes. We are protean like—malleable.

But a protean life is tragic...you have no real sense of identity. You are what you are at the moment...you blow with the Winds. Today I'll be this; tomorrow I'll be that. We go along With what seems to work best in the world.

Paul's pastoral advice is non-protean! Here's the way we Christians live! Like clothing put on, dress in compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, Patience. Build a Christian culture.

We are told that what drew people to the early church in droves Was the distinctiveness of their life together. They kept the Main thing, the main thing! Whoever Christ was, could be Seen by observing them!!

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts! By the way, Colossians 3:15 is the theme verse for the upcoming Via de Cristo of which our own Dave Lynn is the lay leader. Could Paul even be giving us advice about this peace?

That in trying on these 5 virtues we then are opened to A sense of life that is Christ like? Where the ruling Distinctions of the day hold no sway....Earlier in Colossians three Paul says it this way---

There is no longer Greek/Jew, circumcised/uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free.....these common ways of identity, of clothing Are not what defines us. We are not a club, we are set apart to reveal the new humanity that God in Christ intends.

So here we are at the precipice of a new year. What will this new year reveal? What will it reveal about us? What are we wearing?

Will we find ourselves focused on the main thing—living
A fully clothed life—bound in love, focused on Christ,
Living by his ruling peace, filled with a song,
Benchmarking all that we do in view of who we are

Believing, Belonging, Serving!!

I have some pastoral advice for us---

It's not something I've written, but it comes in good authority from one who
has rightly shared the implications for us of living our Baptism....it's our life
work

St. Paul, Colossians 3: 12-17.

Here it is. A good guide for the new year.

No, not just a good guide.

The best, central, life-giving advice you and I may

Ever hear and most need.

Try it on for size!