

Sermon Title: Clothe Yourself in Compassion
Scripture Text: Colossians 3:12-15
Theme: Compassion as a Spiritual Practice
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Dialog Sermon

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Colossians 3:12-15

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.¹

Jody Pierce and I have been talking about doing this for several months. I'm glad the day has finally arrived. Welcome, Jody. Jody, I usually start with a short piece of humor. You might appreciate this. A church bulletin announcement read, "The Self-Esteem Group meets Thursday at 7 pm. Please use the back door." You would never do that at the Pennock Center. Everybody uses the front door. This scripture text that we are reading today seems to touch on what the Pennock Center for Counseling is all about.

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Clothe Yourselves With Compassion

The Apostle Paul wrote at verse 12: “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.”

[Paul Soderquist’s thoughts:]

- Paul wrote in verse 12, “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.”
- I like that the Colossians are called God’s chosen ones. I like the idea that God chooses us. Jesus once said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you...”² But it also conjures up images of gym class in school, and choosing up sides for a round of basketball. I wasn’t very athletic in school. I was usually chosen last. Sports wasn’t my thing. I was better in music, and I thought I should stick with that.
- Paul wrote to the Colossians, God’s chosen ones, to put on compassion. And we can rightly apply this to ourselves as well, that we who are present day followers of Jesus should put on compassion.
- I notice that compassion is a word found in the Pennock Center’s mission statement:

Pennock Center for Counseling Mission Statement
**Compassionate mental health services
based on a foundation of hope and change**

- Jody, the Pennock Center is about compassion, isn’t it?

[Jody Pierce’s comments:]

² John 15:16

A Compassionate Heart Has Patience and Forgives

The Apostle Paul wrote at verse 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.”

[Paul Soderquist’s comments:]

- Bear with one another. There used to be a board game we played called The Ungame. It taught Christian values in a fun and non-confrontational kind of way. And if I’m not mistaken, there’s a place on the board called Impatience Island. Impatience Island is a penalty box, recognizing that we all have moments of impatience. A compassionate heart bears with others. That takes patience and understanding.
- “Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other ...” When something goes wrong in a relationship and someone is harmed, getting an apology is one thing. Actually forgiving someone for the harm they have done is another.
- I went to a conference a few years ago about helping people recover from abusive relationships. After hearing the presenter give almost everything she had, I asked, “What’s the role of forgiveness?” She didn’t have an answer. It made me think that maybe we Americans as a group are losing the place forgiveness has in healthy relationships.
- Jody, is there a place for forgiveness these days?

[Jody Pierce’s comments:]

The Binding Power of Love

The Apostle Paul wrote at verse 14: “Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

[Paul Soderquist’s comments:]

- I like how Eugene Peterson in *The Message* puts this. He writes, “And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It’s your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.” I like that. Love is our all-purpose garment.
- I know this is very, very basic, but I’ll say it anyway. Love is more than a feeling. It’s an attitude, an attitude of respect and care and commitment. It’s a commitment to those you care about. It’s an action word as much as it is a feeling word. If you love someone, you’ll listen to them and you’ll show them respect. That kind of love can bind us together. It’s easy to say in words. It’s harder to do in practice.
- We don’t always get that right, do we, Jody?

[Jody Pierce’s comments:]

Related Matters of the Heart: Peace and Gratitude

Paul wrote at verse 15: “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.”

[Paul Soderquist’s comments:]

- The letter to the Colossians says to “... let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts ...” That sounds like a conscious choice. To let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts indicates it is an intentional act, a decision, to be about peace.
- Peace in Greek is [Ειρήνη] *ay-ray’-nay*. If there are any people here named “Irene,” your name in Greek means *peace*. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. Let it rule, let it take precedence.
- Paul was writing this letter to the first century Christians who as a group were a persecuted and disbursed bunch. They had plenty of reasons to be upset. Even today in the year 2011, if you want to be upset, you can always find a reason.
- In the middle of all that, Paul wrote, “And be thankful.” I once worked for a Navy Chaplain from Georgia whose favorite saying was and is, “You always have something to be thankful for.”
- Meister Eckhart (c. 1260 – c. 1327), the German Christian philosopher of the Middle Ages, wrote, “If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough.” The Christian heart is a thankful heart. The Christian’s prayer is a prayer of thanks.
- Jody, there are plenty of people experiencing discord today. They don’t have the fullness of the peace of Christ. You help some of them at the Pennock Center, don’t you?

[Jody Pierce’s comments:]

What can we do to support the Pennock Center for counseling?

[Paul Soderquist's comments:]

Jody, this is great having you here. I thank you for coming. I have a closing question for you. What can we do to support your compassionate work at the Pennock Center for Counseling?

[Jody Pierce's comments:]