

## Wesley United Methodist Church

December 27, 2015

"A Recipe for Love."

Colossians 3:12-17

In ancient times, a king decided to find and honor the greatest person among his subjects. A man of wealth and property was singled out. Another was praised for his healing powers and a third for the wisdom and knowledge of the law. Still another was lauded for his business acumen. Many other successful people were brought to the palace, and it became evident that the task of choosing the greatest would be difficult. Finally, the last candidate stood before the king. This woman had white hair and her eyes shone with the light of knowledge, understanding and love.

"Who is this?" asked the king. "What has she done?" "You have seen and heard all the others," said the king's aide. "This one is their teacher!" With this the people all applauded and the king came down from his throne to honor her as the greatest of his subjects.

Those at court learned that while worldly success might initially be perceived to be of greatest importance, the true formula for life is learning from others and teaching others to be successful. Contemporary society measures success by the number of things we possess, accolades and awards received, significant positions attained, or the amount of influence or power we wield. Yet, Jesus Christ, whom we follow and whose birth we continue to celebrate during this Christmas season, came among us as a poor man. He achieved few if any of the marks that today labels for success, yet more people follow him and his teaching today than any other religious leader. Why? Jesus was the teacher who taught us the formula for life.

Today we hear how the apostle Paul, writing to the Colossians, gives the community a recipe for success, not in this world necessarily, but more important for eternal life.

In today's reading, Paul lays out the qualities, virtues, and characteristic that when knitted together become a fabric, a garment that when worn and used properly becomes our garment that makes us followers of Christ. First, Paul says, we are God's chosen ones. We have been entrusted with a special and magnificent gift. We then have a responsibility to clothe ourselves in this message and to bring it to others. Christ is our teacher and we must continue his work by teaching others, not only in words, but in our actions, attitudes, and in general the way we live our Christian call to holiness.

Because we have been chosen, we are seen as holy and beloved in God's sight. We are special to God; we are his children. To be seen as special in the eyes of the Creator is certainly a great privilege. If God considers us holy, then we must respond and act accordingly. We must be holy people, demonstrating by our actions and our words that we desire to follow the pattern of Christ's life. Jesus clearly gave us a pattern for life, a way to live not only for ourselves but for others.

In order to live a life of holiness, patterned on the life of Jesus, Paul presents us with basic qualities that we must weave into the fabric of our own life. He says we must be people of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and to bear with one another. Quite obviously, especially in our fast-paced society, these are lofty goals. Yet, if we seek to be holy and follow in the footsteps of Christ, we must do our best to not back away from the challenge that these virtues bring.

Compassion and kindness are lofty goals. One of the basic qualities we seek in others is their ability to demonstrate kindness, but often we ourselves are anything but kind. Rather, we are often at each other's throats, seeking our own agendas. Too much kindness or compassion toward someone else may mean that they will take advantage of your kindness.

Today humility and meekness are often viewed as signs of weakness. Society tells us we must always appear strong, in control and command of any and all situations. Jesus' teaching in the gospel to sit at the low end of the table and wait to be called up higher is inconsistent with today's message for success. We are always told to put our best foot forward. While we must maximize our potential and use God's gift wisely, it should never be done at the expense of others. When applying for a job or entrance to college or other

educational endeavors, our resume must be superior and stand out from others. Still, if we take time and use our wisdom, this can be done in ways to demonstrate Christian humility. Meekness and humility are not weakness, but rather part of the fabric of holiness.

Patience is also an important virtue that is part of the formula for life. We all heard the prayer. "O Lord, grant me patience and give it to me now." Our society wants things instantly. We want instant gratification and success and the wealth and the power that go with it. We want instant resolutions to problems. We do not like to wait for anything. We hate to be in lines, whether it is at the bank, the grocery store, or on the road.

Yet, if we think about it, many if not most of the great things in life take time. We cannot rush the seasons; they come each year as the calendar dictates. You cannot rush your favorite recipe; great food takes time to prepare and, therefore, a certain sense of patience. Unless we receive a windfall, fortune, success, and prestige also take time. Clearly, the important things in life are earned by some type of patient endurance.

Paul also asks us to bear with one another and be forgiving. Too often we hold grudges and will not let the past go--past problems, hurts, injuries, those we have initiated and those perpetrated against us. We use these events of the past as tools to hammer people today for the things of the past. Yet, holding onto a grudge and pain from the past actually holds us back; it slows us down. Past hurts are like a ball and chain shackled to our leg. Unless we cut the chain we will always be hindered in our ability to move forward.

The climax of the reading is that we must do all these virtues in love. Love is much more than romantic love. It is also the love of sisters and brothers, and the greatest form of love is agape, the service to others. We must bind our compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience together in love through service to others.

In today's scripture we are told to be grateful for all things. Our gratitude to God is obviously something that we are to live by. We must demonstrate our gratitude by leading lives that are consistent with his word and message. We must give thanks for the many ways that God blesses us--the people who help us along the path of life, for the opportunities that come our way, and for the talents we possess. We should also be grateful, believe it or not, for the weaknesses we possess and the failures in life as these can help us to learn invaluable lessons.

Having a resume that will give us life opportunities is fine, even necessary in our world. Let us take this challenge seriously and learn from Jesus what we need to complete our resume for life. Our efforts bring success and prosperity today, but more important eternal life tomorrow.