

Hello everyone, how is your week going? I am so excited to celebrate Thanksgiving and get into the Advent season. What a beautiful time of year to embrace the Lord Jesus and draw near to him. We have much to be grateful for and much to live for!

Today's reading is found in Colossians 3:12-13

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."

This is such a beautiful and inspiring piece of scripture. I encourage you to read on through the passage and really let it soak in. It is chock full of good stuff. I tried writing my message today going up through verse 17, but it turned into a sermon! We will save that for a later date! Let's start at the beginning. First we are reminded that we are God's chosen people. We are set apart for him and "dearly loved". Because of the love shown to us, we are to imitate God's righteousness, his pure attitude, his loving kindness. We are told to "clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience." We are given a strategic list here of the things we should arm ourselves with each day to live for God. This is not to say that it is as easy as 1 2 3, but God wants us to show all of these characteristics towards others.....and we are reminded that we are dearly loved, so we get a fresh start to get this right every day. We are reminded that the Lord has forgiven us, so we should then forgive others....Are you holding a grudge for any reason today? Do you have a good excuse for not forgiving someone? Consider this passage before hanging onto that. God has a better way for us, he has forgiven us, so we don't own the right to decide whether or not we forgive others. We do it because we love God.

"And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity". Think of layering all of these characteristics on like clothing, as if you were going out to romp around in the snow on a cold upstate NY day. You wear many layers right? They all serve a good purpose, the turtle neck, the sweater, the thick socks, the pants. Each plays a role in keeping you warm and protected. But, the most important part of the whole ensemble is the Jacket. It is not only warm, but it is water proof, without it everything else falls apart and becomes useless in a sense. The sweater gets wet and soggy and then the icicles form on the cuffs. Snow gets down in all the nooks and crannies....you get the idea. If we don't have that jacket on to tie the outfit together then what is the point? We lose the value of the other warm things we have put on. This passage is somewhat like that. All of these other traits (the compassion, kindness, humility, etc) are perfectly bound by love. Love ties them together. Without love, they lose their value, they don't measure up. Sure they are all nice characteristics, not bad qualities to possess, but on their own - without love they are not enough. A passage from 1 Corinthians comes to mind, "If I have a faith that can move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing". Nothing. That is a scary thought, seems so empty. But plainly we read, if we do not love, we have nothing. Without love, all of these other traits are wasted because they should always be provoked by love, a product of love, the outcome of love. Because we love, we are compassionate, kind, etc. You with me? So, I have to ask, what motivates you today? When you do things for others is it because you feel obligated? You have to do it because it's "the right thing to do"? Do you think your works will add up someday? Or do you love God so much that you can't help but love all over people? Are you kind and patient and gentle and compassionate because you are so full of love that those other qualities just pour out of you? Are you even interested in being that way? Let's pray.

Lord, we are so thankful for the love and forgiveness and patience you show us each and every day. You are so amazing, so merciful, so understanding. We ask that we learn to love the way you do. That we can live up to the hopes you have for us, that we can truly understand what it is to love no matter what. We ask for your strength as we have those in our lives that we need to forgive. We ask for your grace as we need forgiveness from others as well. Hear our prayer today and speak to our hearts. In your precious name, Amen.