

"BOUND TOGETHER: CLOTHED IN CHRIST"

Colossians 3:1-17

NATIONAL YOUTH CONFERENCE THEME

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York Center Church of the Brethren

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Colossians 3:1-17 The Message (MSG)

3 ¹⁻² *So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that's where the action is. See things from his perspective.*

³⁻⁴ *Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your real life—even though invisible to spectators—is with Christ in God. He is your life. When Christ (your real life, remember) shows up again on this earth, you'll show up, too—the real you, the glorious you. Meanwhile, be content with obscurity, like Christ.*

⁵⁻⁸ *And that means killing off everything connected with that way of death: sexual promiscuity, impurity, lust, doing whatever you feel like whenever you feel like it, and grabbing whatever attracts your fancy. That's a life shaped by things and feelings instead of by God. It's because of this kind of thing that God is about to explode in anger. It wasn't long ago that you were doing all that stuff and not knowing any better. But you know better now, so make sure it's all gone for good: bad temper, irritability, meanness, profanity, dirty talk.*

⁹⁻¹¹ *Don't lie to one another. You're done with that old life. It's like a filthy set of ill-fitting clothes you've stripped off and put in the fire. Now you're dressed in a new wardrobe. Every item of your new way of life is custom-made by the Creator, with his label on it. All the old fashions are now obsolete. Words like Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and irreligious, insider and outsider, uncivilized and uncouth, slave and free, mean nothing. From now on everyone is defined by Christ, everyone is included in Christ.*

¹²⁻¹⁴ *So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly*

and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.

¹⁵⁻¹⁷ Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing, sing your hearts out to God! Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God every step of the way.

How did you decide what to wear today?

- Did you choose your clothing last night? OR
- Did you just pick up what you dropped on the floor yesterday?
- Did you put a lot of thought into what you would wear to church today? OR
- Did you grab the last clean piece of clothing left in your closet?

When I was a kid my Mom had this terrible habit of dressing my four sisters and me alike. Five of the exact same dresses in five different sizes. We were adorable! And I hated it! I didn't want to look like everyone else! Yet, on the first day of NYC I happily wore the same t-shirt as one hundred other people. Our matching t-shirts marked us a staff so as the NYC participants arrived they knew who to ask for help and direction.

What we wear is important. It matters. The clothing we wear shows others very clearly who we are and what we value. Our choices shout our identity.

- Who is a Cubs fan? Do you wear a White Sox shirt? Why not?

Clothing designers hit a goldmine years ago when they realized that people

would pay them a lot of money just to be walking billboards. How crazy is that? We spend big bucks to advertise a company name on our shirts and hats and shoes.

Many of us probably remember clothing we wore and loved in our younger days that we wouldn't be caught dead in now- fortunately some have gone out of style- remember bell bottoms and polyester leisure suits? Tube tops anyone?

- Some of our clothing no longer fits.
- Some isn't as comfortable as it used to be.

- And some of our favorites have just worn out.
- Many of us have more clothing than we need.

What we choose to wear is important. Has anyone ever said to you, just as you are about to leave the house: "*Are you wearing that?*" Is that a compliment?

The theme for National Youth Conference was "Bound Together: Clothed in Christ." It is a reminder to us that no matter what may separate us from one another- geography, theology, sexual orientation, ethnicity, language- we are still connected because of our life in Christ. Several speakers at the conference named the divisions in our denomination and our nation. They called the youth to be the ones to cross those boundaries and to be an example for the rest of the church. They called our teenagers to figure out what is most important and then to live as followers of Jesus Christ.

The theme text from Colossians has long been a favorite of mine. The language is so rich, so familiar, so inviting. Even way back then, the Apostle Paul knew that we all need to wear clothing. Right? What better metaphor for putting on our new life in Christ than clothing. It's brilliant.

As I read this text I picture taking off a dirty coat, soiled shoes, a ragged sweatshirt and pulling on a clean and sweet-smelling sweater or a pair of socks right out of the dryer. Paul is telling us that if we have really truly made the decision to follow Jesus then our outsides should match our insides. If we are his disciple then we will take off the garments and attitudes of bad temper, envy, meanness, profanity, and prejudice. And we will happily dress ourselves in compassion, humility, kindness, and especially, love.

If we claim to be a disciple of Jesus then our attitudes, actions, behaviors, and words should reflect him and him alone. It isn't enough to just put on our "spiritual clothes" for worship Sunday mornings. One or two hours a week is not enough. Christ requires us to dress in his love every single day of the week.

I will be the first to say this is not easy. Some of my old clothing and attitudes are actually pretty comfortable and I like how they look. More often than I would like to admit I will put on my old coat of envy or my sweater of impatience. But soon

enough I find they aren't as comfortable as I thought they were and I, once again, take them off and hide them in the back of my closet.

Our choice of clothing is about more than just protection and comfort. It makes a statement. Our choice of spiritual clothing is even more important than our physical garments. Where and when and how we learn to wear the clothing of faith is crucial. Our lives have integrity when we live in ways that are congruent with what we say we believe. If we say we believe in Jesus Christ then our lives should reflect him in everything we say and do.

Through his life on earth, Jesus showed us quite clearly how to live. We are to care for others, reach out to those in need, share our food and our faith. We are called to stand up for what we believe in, even when it may be unpopular. We are called to be different from the world around us.

We are called to another way of living. We are called to love our enemies and a lot of other things that are really hard to do. But we can do this because in Jesus, God dressed like us. God put on human skin, was born just as we are born, and walked around looking just like us.

To our young folks- one thing I want you to remember is that in the coming years you will try on a lot of different outfits. As you figure out who you are, what you believe, and who God has called you to be, you will wear many different garments. Some of them will seem to fit really well but will turn out to be fashion (spiritual) disasters. Others will turn you off at first but over time will grow on you and become very comfortable and comforting. We are never done growing and maturing in our faith- and so all of us, no matter how young or old we are, know that our spiritual clothing will also change along the way. We will outgrow some things. We will find that a particularly difficult spiritual gift will suddenly become our favorite thing to wear.

We are mistaken when we think that the outfit we wear at our baptism or at the moment we commit our lives to Christ, is what we will wear for the rest of our lives.

It won't be. It shouldn't be. And what better place to learn how to dress as followers of Jesus; what better place to figure out what to wear than here- in this place, this church, this faith community. It doesn't happen overnight but over a lifetime. And it takes a whole family of faith to help us build our wardrobe.

We come to worship so that we can participate in an authentic faith community, made up of imperfect people with an imperfect pastor, who do their best to follow the resurrected Christ.

We come to church so that we can see what being a Christian looks like—and sometimes even what it doesn't look like.

We worship and learn together so we can remember that we are chosen, holy, and beloved by the God who created the universe, the

same God who looked around at the beautiful, amazing, exquisite world and said, "We need one of YOU."

We don't come to worship once, pull on a t-shirt, and figure we're set for the rest of our lives. We come to worship and Sunday School and meetings and fellowship events week after week, month after month, year after year because that is how long it takes to learn how to dress as a Christian. We learn compassion, kindness, humility and then understand how to layer that with meekness and patience. Then we pull on forgiveness and gratitude. We top it all off with love- the all-purpose garment.

In his letter to the Colossians Paul is encouraging them to dress their souls in the way of Christ. He wanted them to be a well-dressed congregation, moving forward into a new life in Christ.

We too are called to leave behind the old ways of doing and being the church, the old ways of being in the world that are no longer working - or maybe they never worked- and to welcome the inbreaking of God's new world in our midst. We are at a

decisive moment in the life of our denomination. We are living in a time of turmoil and unrest in our nation.

- Now is the time for us to make the choice to put on Christ.
- Now is the time for us to decide that the wardrobe of the world no longer appeals to us.
- **Now is the time for us to call others to remove the white robes of racism and the worn-out garments of homophobia.**
- **Now is the time to take off the cloak of nationalism that some confuse with true Christianity. You cannot wrap yourself in the grace of Christ and the flag at the same time.**

Now more than ever, what we wear matters and we should think carefully about how we will present ourselves to those around us. We have met the Living Christ so we cannot claim ignorance. We cannot pretend we don't know what is expected of us. We cannot put it off until later. Our faith must be visible to be genuine.

The time is now!

May we do the hard work of being a well-dressed congregation, willing to seek the spiritual depths of our faith in Christ.

And do not forget this: You are chosen, holy, and beloved. By the power and mercy of Jesus Christ we are Bound Together!

Thanks be to God!

Amen.