

Since we touched on verses 12-15 last week I considered skipping over these and just starting with verse 16, but then I realized that in many ways it's pivotal for our understanding of the passage today that we hear those first four words: "As God's chosen ones." In other words, as the ones who have been created by God, loved by God, called by God. As the ones whose identity is in Christ and Christ alone, whose story, as we've discussed throughout Colossians is now found in the story of the resurrected Christ, the image of the invisible God, here is what you are called to do. First, as we mentioned briefly last week, you are called to "clothe yourselves in things like compassion, kindness, humility and love."

And as I oftentimes like about Paul, he gives us a great image, doesn't he? We're called to clothe ourselves in these things. As I was thinking about that I was reminded of a story about my dad and sister (who is here this weekend). When my sister was young she never felt like brushing the back of her hair and thought it was a waste of time since, as she pointed out to my dad, no one ever saw the back of her head. My father was never able to convince her until one day the two of them were walking out of the house to go somewhere. As they were leaving, my sister gave a gasp and said, "Dad, you can't go out like that!" My father, you see, had taken a t-shirt of his and cut out the back. "Why not," he said to her, "No one ever sees the back." Needless to say my sister never had to be told to brush the back of her hair again.

My point is the clothing and wearing all of our clothing is important. So important, in fact, that we do it each and every day. It's not something we just do on Sundays (I hope!), but something that we wake up each morning and intentionally think about and ponder. And when Paul points out that we need to clothe ourselves in love and gentleness and humility, he's saying that it's something that we need to do every single day. That clothes won't just jump on our bodies, just like love and gentleness won't just start pouring through us. We have to be deliberate and intentional, every single day if we are going to be a people who truly act like chosen and loved ones of God, that we are called to be.

Paul then goes on to remind us that not only are we to be clothed in these things, but that we also need to allow the word of Christ to dwell in us richly, to teach and admonish one another and to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. In many ways, of course, this is exactly what we do at worship isn't it? We dwell in the Word, we teach and we sing. That's just what you do. It seems really normal.

A few years ago I was listening to a Presbyterian pastor from Bellevue, Washington, who was telling the story of how a university student, who had never been to a church worship service before, came to him and said that for a project she was supposed to visit a service and talk to the pastor. He agreed and so the following Sunday she went to the worship service and afterward she and the pastor got together. And the first question she asked him was, "Why do you sing?" As I thought about that I realized that yeah, it really is kind of weird. There's not a lot of places we go where we just randomly start singing. I have to say I'd never really thought about that very much until I heard her question. While most of us would say that singings is important, we often spend a whole lot more energy thinking

about what songs we like or don't like and which style we prefer than actually thinking about why it is that we sing at all.

Several years ago now a documentary came out about the little country of Estonia. Estonia is in Eastern Europe and for much of the 20th century they were a part of the Soviet Union. As was usually the case, Estonia wasn't super pleased with being a part of the Soviet Union, but the Russians did everything they could to "Russify" them so to speak. They made Russian the primary language, taught history from a Russian perspective and even moved lots of Russians into Estonia to help water down the Estonian ethnicity. One of the other things they did was to outlaw Estonian patriotic songs.

And though the Estonians didn't have the military strength to ever directly fight the Russians, they still had their voices and singing had always played a huge role in who Estonia was. And so, they sang. And in the years between 1986 and 1991 they began to sing with new fervor. At concerts they began to sing the outlawed songs with incredible gusto and at times the crowds would swell to upwards of 300,000 people, all singing the same song. Eventually this movement would be dubbed the "Singing Revolution" because it was this singing that played a huge role in allowing Estonia to finally gain its' independence.

And what's fascinating is to hear how this revolution has been described. One person said, "The powers in the communist part were afraid because these songs ignited the passions of the people." Someone else said that the singing, "brought Estonians together and gave them the courage to rebel." And a New York Times writer said, "In bold acts of singing they reclaimed their identity."

Listen to these words. The songs ignited passion, brought people together to give them courage and helped form their identity. What does singing do for us in the church? Why does Paul want us to sing? Not in order to fill time or because it makes us feel good or because it's the one chance that we have during the week to practice our Karaoke. No, it's because it helps to ignite our passions. This is what we talked about a few weeks ago about making sure our faith doesn't simply stay in our heads. We sing because it helps to build community, again a running theme for us this month. We sing because we need to have our courage built up so that we can boldly go into the world. We sing because we need to continually be reminded of our identity in Christ. That just as the Estonians had to constantly reject the notion that they were Soviets, so too do we have to constantly reject any notion that would tell us that our identity is not found in Christ or that we have not been called by God. As we've said again and again during our look at this letter, we are a part of the new story, we have died to our selves and been raised with Christ. If you wrestle with believing that, then start singing more. Singing is not a polite, nifty thing to do. It is a revolutionary act for those who have ears to hear.

We sing to be reminded and to strengthen us in the knowledge of Christ, in the knowledge that we have been chosen and called by God. We sing these revolutionary songs each and every week. We practice here so that we can go out and start a revolution of sorts. And so our clothes of Christ have been donned and our revolutionary songs are being sung, which means we're ready to go into action, ready to hear Paul say, "Charge, into the world!"

But well, that's not what we get, is it? No, as our clothes of Christ have been donned and our revolutionary songs are being sung he says, "Great, now wives, be subject to your husbands. Husbands love your wives. Children, obey your parents. Fathers, don't provoke your children. Slaves, obey your masters and masters, treat your slaves fairly." What?! Here we are pumped up by the music and ready to charge and now Paul is talking about loving and submitting and obeying. What's he talking about?

Now, it's important perhaps for us to begin to look at this by quickly addressing what is probably uncomfortable language for us about wives being subject to husbands and slaves obeying masters. It's pretty easy for us in this day and age to perhaps look askance at what Paul is saying and wonder why Paul is saying this. Shouldn't husband and wives love each other and why doesn't Paul say anything negatively about slavery? Well, we could spend a lot of time talking about this, and that's probably better done in a class, but let me simply bring up one thing.

When I took my first call at Heritage in Chicago we had 45 people who attended worship. I can remember one Sunday in particular when there were 30 people who I looked out on as I preached. Fast forward nearly a decade to when I come here and when there's 400 or so folks here on a Sunday morning I hear people saying, "Man, where is everybody?!" I'm thinking, "What are you talking about?" There's 400 people here, it's amazing!

My point is that it's all about perspective. What seems like an insignificant amount of people to you all is astounding to me. And I think that what may seem like insignificant words for us today as we read this passage would have been astounding to the people who received this letter, especially for the women, the children and the slaves. What's so astounding?

Well, first of all, because Paul is actually speaking to them. When he says "Wives" or "Children" or "Slaves" he is talking to them as if they exist as if they matter as if they are, well, chosen by God. In this time and place women, children and slaves simply didn't matter that much, they were, by and large, simply not considered much at all. Women were given few, if any, legal rights, slaves were considered as property and children were often called on to be like servants to their parents: washing their parent's feet, making their parent's bed and simply standing read to wait on them (this, quite frankly, I think we should go back to!). And so Paul addressing them in this important letter makes it clear that they are important.

Not only this, but equally astounding is that the fathers, parents and owners are given duties that actually restrict their powers. To love, to not provoke and to be fair and just. While these may seem ordinary and self-evident to us, they certainly were not in this time. And so when they heard these words, as insignificant and non-revolutionary as they may sound to us, the reality is that most would have heard these words with wide eyes and mouths. That Paul really did mean it when he said there are no longer slave or free and as he will say in Galatians, no longer male or female.

But what was also striking to me as I read this was how similar it was to what we often see happening with Jesus. Jesus was continually describing for the disciples a whole

different world and the disciples kept saying, "Great, let's go get them!" "Let's overthrow this government!" "Let's take Jerusalem back." To which Jesus would say things like "Love your neighbor" and "Blessed are the meek."

So too do we hear this morning where Paul is telling us to sing songs that will elicit for us passion and community and courage and then says, "Okay, now, go love your wife, obey your parents, don't provoke, be fair and just." It just doesn't seem all that revolutionary. I mean where's the part about making disciples of all the world and changing the communities around us.

And yet, perhaps what Paul is saying and what Jesus understood all too well is that a revolution for God's kingdom will only be as impactful as it is genuine and real. And if you want to know whether or not someone is truly living as if they've been chosen and called by God, as if they are a part of a new story in Christ, all you have to do is ask their wife or husband or child or parent or, to change the letter a bit, their coworker or boss. They will know better than anyone else, whether or not you are living into the revolutionary new world that our songs are espousing. They will know whether or not we are awaking each morning and putting on our clothes of Christ.

Because singing a song about God's grace and then preaching that grace from the street corner is one thing, but singing of God's grace and then showing that same grace to your spouse after he or she has wronged you is a whole different ballgame. That telling your children to obey God is good and right, but showing your children in your own life what it means to obey God is much more radical. That speaking out about injustice in the world is absolutely a part of our calling, but treating those with whom you work with fairness and kindness, day in and day out, takes a whole different kind of commitment.

Because the reality is that, more often than not, the best indicator as to whether or not you are daily putting on your clothing of compassion, kindness, humility and love is whether or not your family or coworkers are experiencing it. The best measuring tool for whether or not the songs you sing on Sundays and throughout the week are shaping you into someone who is passionate for God and who is clearly living life as if they have been resurrected with Christ, are those around you. And while for most of us, it was a bit uncomfortable a few weeks ago when I asked you to go talk to someone you didn't know and ask them about themselves, I have a feeling that for many of us, it might be even more uncomfortable to ask those we know incredibly well whether our lives are truly reflecting the image of Christ.

So, sisters and brothers in Christ wake up tomorrow morning and put on your clothes of compassion, kindness and humility. Get in the shower or turn on the radio and begin singing passionately about your salvation, about your identity in Christ, about your gratitude to God. And then do the remarkably revolutionary act of allowing your spouse, your mom and dad, your son and daughter, your boss and co-workers, to see just what a radical difference it has made in your life that you are a new creation, that your life is found in the resurrected Christ. That they may then join you in singing and celebrating who God is and what God has done in our world and in our lives. May it be so. Amen.