

Colossians 3:12-17
Streamlining
(Run of the House)
Rev. Jonathan Cornell
8-24-14

We are continuing a series of messages this summer through the book of Colossians in which we are asking this question: what does a community that is being formed by Jesus look like? And today we come to the “who” question. Not the “who” question of who is the center; that we’ve touched upon in the last few weeks. But the “who” of your question. Who did you bring with you to worship this morning? How do you understand yourself as you walk through these doors? By what name?

When you think of yourself, do you think of yourself using the name Paul gives in verse 9, the old self, with its practices; or do you think of yourself as the new self, the one that is being renewed? Jesus sees you very differently than you see yourself. And when we come to this place, we are invited to see of ourselves what Jesus sees in us.

So I invite you to turn with me to this morning’s text, Colossians 3 verses 12-17. If you’re following along in the red pew Bibles we’ve made available for you in the pew racks in front of you, it can be found on page 186. And out of respect for the authority of God’s Word, would you stand with me as we read Colossians 3:12-17.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

I had a voice in my head this last week—one more than usual—as I was driving along I94 Chicago, a route I’ve taken hundreds of times. I heard this voice over and over again telling me which way to go. Anyone who has ever driven amongst the clinically insane who are Chicago drivers, you know that I was not about to take my hands off the wheel to address the voice. As you can imagine, it was my phone’s map program. So as I’m going along, I keep hearing Google Maps telling me, “Turn left at the next exit.” “I’m not going to turn left; I know where I’m going.” “In 500 yards turn left, turn left immediately, TURN LEFT. Recalculating, make a u turn at the next possible moment.”

Anyone who has used voice guided maps knows that after a while, you sort of forget where the voice is coming from, especially if you’re listening through the ear buds. You think to yourself, “Where is this voice coming from?” It even sort of starts to sound like

your own voice, and you say to yourself, “I hear this voice overlapping with my own voice in my head and...which me is me? One says to me turn right, and another me says go straight. If I follow the wrong voice I’m in danger of not getting where I want to go.”

The same is true of our lives, as well. Don’t we all have multiple voices telling us which way to go? Maybe there’s a voice that says “go go go” when you know you have to stop and rest (I know this voice well). Or maybe the voice says “stop” and you know that the thing you have to do is persevere. Or the voice that says “hurt that person” and you know that what you need to do is to love that person and totally.

So when we are unsure what voice it is that we are to follow, what voice gives me the guidance I need, what voice will lead me to the right destination, the Apostle Paul speaks up, saying to the church here in Colossae, “**Let the word of Christ dwell within you richly.**” That’s verse 16. This morning friends, even as we as we are here in this room, there are voices competing for our attention, but there is only one voice that matters, one voice to which you and I must listen, and that’s the voice of our Savior Jesus Christ. **Let the word of Christ dwell within you richly.**

What is this word of Christ? Perhaps it’s the words spoken by Jesus that we have been passed down to us, the word about Christ. Or perhaps it is the definitive word spoken by Christ that gives our lives ultimate meaning and purpose. Maybe it’s both. Whatever it is, it is the one word that we must hear in life and in death, it is the one word that we must hear if we are ever going to know who we really are and whose we are.

But it isn’t always easy to remember who we are, ‘cause there are so many other voices trying to crowd in. Is anyone else like me and about once a day you give yourself the Christian dope slap, and say, “Why did I say that thing? I’m such an idiot. You should be ashamed of yourself, bad dog.” These are the voices we hear: you’re not smart enough, you’re not pretty enough, you’re not healthy enough. What name did you bring with you into this house today?

Because the good news is that in this house, the only voice that matters is the word of Christ. **Let the word of Christ dwell within you richly.** Jesus Christ wants to give you a new name. Jesus Christ wants to draw you more deeply into fellowship with him, into that loving and life transforming embrace of his that you can walk out of this place new and renewed today. And the apostle Paul is beginning to form a sketch of what that new name might look like for you.

In verse 12, Paul uses three words to describe what this new self looks like. He says as God’s *CHOSEN* ones. You are unique in that God chose you, and Jesus chose you when he went to the cross to suffer and redeem a lost world. When he did that, he thought of you. The second word is *HOLY*. To have the moral purity of God himself. The burning bush is that symbol of God’s holiness. It was so awesome that Moses had to take off his shoes in its presence. Then there’s you. God’s word has made you Holy. And, best of all, *BELOVED*; God calls you his beloved. God had a beloved nation and places, God has a

beloved Son on whom the Spirit descended at his baptism, and then there's you. Paul says you are God's beloved one.

These are the new names that we hear, these are the names we can go by when we come into this house, when we press in to Jesus. This is what chapter 3 is all about, the new identity we receive when we put on Jesus. When you receive him, when you are raised with him, your old self dies, and now your life is hidden with Christ. What does that mean, hidden? It means that you can't see the real you. When you look in the mirror, what you see isn't the real you, the blemishes, the disabilities, the aging body, that's not you. The only way you can see the real you is by looking at Christ who dwells in you. In him, we see our true selves—Chosen, Holy, Beloved.

I love that Paul uses this word *dwell* . Eugene Peterson translates this in the Message Bible, "let the word of Christ have the run of the house." It means that when the Word of Christ is inside us, it doesn't just sit there like a statue, or a degree on the wall, or something that happened a long time ago. No, when the word of Christ takes up residence in your hearts, it is actively moving, taking you places you never thought you'd go, performing acts of compassion and mercy you never thought you were capable of. Loving people who appear simply unlovable. This is what happens when the word of Christ dwells in you.

But what's so interesting here is that in the original texts these pronouns *you* aren't in the singular form; they're plural. The *you* is *y'all* . **Let the word of Christ dwell richly in y'all** . Pretty sure that's how Paul would have said it originally. You see that is what this message is telling us today. When Christ dwells within *y'all* , it draws each of us out into what Paul calls teaching, admonishing one another in wisdom, singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (that means hymns and praise songs). This is one of the earliest descriptions of Christian worship that we have. The word doesn't just come to the preacher, but that every one of you in this room this morning has a word within you. Every one of you has a song to sing and a prayer to offer or a touch of compassion to share. That is what Paul says happens to a community, to a people like us when the word dwells in us.

What word is God giving you? Is God giving you a word with which to encourage this community? Right now, do you have one to share? Does anyone have a song God's putting on their hearts that we can sing a measure together? Does anyone have a word of wisdom they would like to share? You see, this is full worship. This is what happens when the Holy Spirit is moving in a place.

When communities are formed by Christ, they take on an identity as a whole, they begin to move and live and interact as one cohesive unit, formed and guided by Christ. And when this happens, remarkable things take place. Lives are transformed. They find the shelter and safety under the Eagle's wings. They are guarded and strengthened by the hand of the Almighty, who tells them, you are my chosen, holy, and beloved people.

I wonder if you've seen this image on the internet or in the media? This is the Arabic letter *nun*. It's the first letter in the word Nazarite, and it has become an identifying symbol in Iraq for any home where Christians reside.

Many of you have asked and are curious about what is happening in Iraq with ISIS. And I want to share with you a letter written by the pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Kirkuk, which is about 100 miles from Mosul in a stable Kurdish-controlled area, who writes:

About 10:30 last night, someone knocked on our door. Being that it was so late, and because of the tenuous situation in my city, my wife and I wondered who would be knocking on our door at this hour. We were not expecting anyone. So, I was afraid to open the door and wondered if I should. I thought it might be a criminal or a militant with a gun. I didn't know what to expect. I hesitated but finally decided to open just a crack and ask who was out there. The person answered me, "I am a Christian from the Mosul area; I am a refugee." I didn't know if I should believe him, so I asked, "How can I be sure you're telling the truth?" He said, "Here is my ID card; see for yourself." My wife was very frightened. She whispered to me to keep a distance from the stranger. I inched toward him warily. I saw his ID card. He was a refugee. He had three daughters; the oldest was not more than five years old. We talked for a long while. I promised him that our church would not leave him alone. The Lord has enabled us to help many displaced Iraqis, regardless of their religion or affiliation. Christ's commandment to us is not to support and help only our own; rather, his commandment is that we serve everyone in his name. Once again, we find ourselves faced with a new challenge. Let us join hands and help those who have come our way.

So as I close, I invite you to stand and let these words of Colossians 3:16-17 be the charge by which we leave this place and go back into God's world and our home. So let's stand and say them together, and as you do, let them sink down deep saturating your every fiber. **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**