

## Colossians 3: 12-17

Paul writes his letter to the Colossians,, to encourage them to think beyond themselves, to give them fresh resolve for the challenge ahead, and to focus their thinking on living lives that were truly Christian lives. Paul wrote to the Church in Colossae from a prison in Rome. Colossae had been an important town on the way between Ephesus and the river Euphrates. By the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD it was a second rate market town. Colossae was important in the New Testament because during Paul's 3 year stop-over and ministry in Ephesus, Epaphras had been converted and carried the gospel to Colossae. However, in time that young emerging church then became the focus of heretical attack, which led to Epaphras visiting Paul in Rome and the writing of this letter which we read today. Paul has been developing his theme that in our church life, we have been given fullness in Christ: Jesus, who is the creator and sustainer of all things, the head of the church and reconciler, is completely adequate. This is in stark contrast to the emptiness of human philosophy. Paul describes secularism in Chapter 2 of Colossians as hollow and deceptive, lacking any ability to restrain the natural sinful and selfish nature. Paul is of course concerned for the individual behaviour of every single Christian – but even more than this, Paul is concerned for the well being of the community as a whole. How was the church at Colossae perceived? How was Jesus presented to the local community by the believers who met together in the church at Colossae? It's a good question to ask ourselves. How is the Christian message, how is Christ himself presented to those who never darken the doors of our churches?

At the beginning of this passage Paul says 'as God's chosen people, clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience'. These things are not always easy. Have you seriously tried to forgive someone who has wronged you? Have you ever seriously tried to be compassionate and patient? Have you ever tried to let Christ's peace, Christ's name, be the reality around which you order your life? If you have you will know it's not easy. It takes serious prayer and moral effort. Christian behaviour makes us more human, not less. We need to absorb the full meaning of these

qualities that Paul reminds us of here. Bear with each other, forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another, forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. It's worth taking a moment to think about each word here and to ask ourselves which sort of action and words will make each one come true in our lives, in the life of our church, in the life of our town. Yes there will be those who scoff, who mock the very idea of behaving like this. Remember, to be tender-hearted is not about sentimentality; being kind is not about being a soft touch; humility is not the same as having a low self-esteem. Meekness is not weakness, but power under control. Being large-hearted doesn't mean letting everyone do what they want. These central virtues of the Christian life make it what it is supposed to be and underline the demanding way of life which is the Christian life.

Paul finishes with four brief enjoinders. Put on love; let the peace of Christ rule in your life; let the word of God dwell richly and do everything in the name of Jesus. *Put on love*: this is the bond that will hold the fellowship together in unity. True Christian love doesn't seek its own, but gives itself in humility to all believers. Only then can completeness be found. *Let the peace of Christ rule*: Christ's desire for peace is a key factor. The rule of Christ is the rule of peace. It is inconceivable that those who share with one another the benefits of that great peacemaking work of the Cross, should live with hatred or contempt for each other in their hearts. When Christ rules in the heart, his peace will rule in the Christian community, his Church and when we put on love and let Christ's peace rule in our community we are better able to present Christ to the world around us. Especially now.

In this time of unprecedented upheaval we, as the church of Christ, are already, I hope presenting the message to the people around us. Everyone of us has a part to play. We might not be able to go and do someone else's shopping, instead perhaps we can pick up the phone - call someone who is on their own, if you can - make a donation to the food bank (or ask someone to do it for you) and above all we are called to be a people of prayer. Prayer will unite us in this time. If you are unsure of what to pray for we have booklets available which can help.

There will be people you know who are missing seeing their families this Mothering Sunday, you may be one of them. Remember in the gospel, Jesus, at his dying moment, asked John to look after Mary

his mother - can we do that for someone too? Can we phone someone we know today - just to be a cheery voice at the end of the phone, reassure people they are not on their own either on this special day or any other day.

We are called to unite as the body of Christ and spread the love of God who is both our Father and our Mother.

Amen