

December 26, 2021  
First Sunday After Christmas

“Faith’s Starting Point”

Colossians 3:12-17

What is your starting point when you contemplate your Christian faith? This is a very, very important question because your starting point frames the perspective by which you receive God’s Word and the promises therein.

Our epistle from Colossians: *“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, 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.”*

So what’s your starting point when you contemplate St. Paul’s words? If you’re like me you start by thinking, “Oh boy. I’ve really got to get it in gear. That sounds great, but I’m not there yet. How am I going to be this person St. Paul is telling me I need to be?”

The starting point is me, and that’s a recipe for disaster. Me is a sinner. Me is unable to be at peace because me on my own is at war with God. Me is selfish and self-centered and has no reason for patience, compassion, humility, meekness and kindness. Me wants to be god unto me and hasn’t got room for anyone else in that top spot. And yet, when contemplating our own Christian faith we often start with “me” in the driver’s seat.

What St. Paul tries to make clear in Colossians is that it is Jesus Christ who is the driver of faith, of forgiveness, of salvation. He does this in the verses leading up to our reading and then begins this section with *“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved...”*

“God’s chosen ones.” You didn’t choose God; He chose you! This is why we Lutherans don’t use that phrase spoken so proudly among a lot of Evangelicals, “I’ve made a personal decision for Christ.” Me doesn’t choose Christ. Me will always choose Me to be God. If it’s my decision to gain Christ unto salvation, that salvation is uncertain because Me is not reliable in a lot of earthly things, much less the divine!

It’s the Christmas season. Who chose Mary? Who chose Bethlehem? Who chose the name “Jesus”? What person on earth would ever choose the King of Glory to enter the world in such a manner? It’s obvious God is driving all the action, and that’s still the case today.

God chose you. Christ chose you. The object of Christian faith is right there in the name: Christ-ian. What is it that Christ has done? He has lived a perfect human life, suffered and died to atone for all of the world’s sin and risen to life in victory. And one might say, “I know all that, but that’s Christ. I’m still a sinful shmoe far removed from Christ’s perfection in my thoughts, words and deeds. And by the way, my faith in Christ’s work isn’t all that great either!”

In the face of Christ that argument does not hold water. Why? Because Christ baptized you! Christ feeds His risen and ascended victorious body and blood to you for the forgiveness of sins. Christ is His Word declares you to be not guilty before the Father. Christ does this; not you. And the Holy Spirit has given you the faith that receives these gifts. It may not be perfect faith

from your point of view, but it doesn't have to be! Why? Christ! Christ is the perfecter of your faith!

So with Christ as your starting point then Paul is exhorting you, a completely holy child of God because of Christ and Christ alone, to now live out the reality Christ has created. You put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience.

I love Paul's phraseology there: "You put on..." Paul is well aware of the sinful nature that clings to us, the "me"-ness that doubts true holiness can be our reality before God. But chosen by God, holy and beloved, we put on Christ's righteousness like a coat that covers all our sin and voila, we stand sanctified, made holy by Christ.

Starting there, with Christ, we then live out that reality in compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience forgiving others as you have been forgiven, loving as you have been loved.

One might then argue, "But that's the point. I don't do that part well at all. I stink at that." Of course YOU stink at this. Be Jesus doesn't and that's really the point. You bring your failures to Him, repent, and are washed of Your sins again by the Baptism He did to you; by which He chose you to be His holy child. And then, as His holy child, "*Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience...*" yadda, yadda, yadda. You put on Christ.

This is tough, I know. You see the you, the "me" in the mirror every day and that person's thoughts, words and deeds don't mesh all that well with Paul's exhortation; with Christ's holiness. But you don't dictate divine reality. Christ the King does. What He declares is true, is true.

Simeon is a great example of this. He is an old man near death and yet in great joy he says those familiar words, "*Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.*"

What's the reality Simeon sees with his eyes? A little baby with poopy diapers. But what word had God revealed to Simeon? This child is the Christ that will save God's people, Jew and Gentile alike, from their sins. Simeon won't see this reality come to pass, but it is reality none the less because God says so. Simeon can depart in peace because God is faithful to His Word.

Likewise, through His atoning death and victorious resurrection, Christ declares you justified, not guilty, blameless and holy before your Creator. The reality of "me" you see before you is not the reality God has declared to be. Your faith is in Christ the King. So "Christ-ian", what Christ declares is true and that is your starting point.

Does this get you off the hook for your failures? Certainly not. Paul is not giving this exhortation for nothing. Every day in reaction to what Christ has declared we are to strive toward holiness, repenting and turning from sins, always working to live out the love with which Christ has chosen us and has clothed us. This is the fruit of the saving faith the Holy Spirit has poured into us. But in that faith, the reality of Christ's claim upon us cannot be broken by sins—their power was made nothing by His cross.

So every day, make your starting point Christ. When you stumble, start over at Christ. Surrender your "me" attitude to Him, because He is in charge and has chosen you, holy and beloved, to be His.

Amen.