

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:12-17)

Where does a Christian Life Come From?

When I was at the seminary, I had a friend who convinced me to train with him for a marathon. So we spent a couple of years running ten k's, and half marathons and finally, we ran the Fox Cities Marathon. During those two or three years, I ran hundreds of miles. The best I could ever do, when I was in the best shape of my life, was about a seven minute mile. My friend and I used to speculate about world class runners. The world record for a man to run a marathon is two hours and fifteen minutes. That means that the guy who ran that time did twenty six consecutive five minute miles. Most of us here today will never do even one five minute mile. Where does that ability come from? I had to conclude that there's just something different about that guy's body. Where do we get gifts and abilities? When we look at people who are gifted musicians or who are good at business or able to understand physics, it's natural for us to wonder where that comes from. Well, today, St. Paul leads us to consider the source of the most important gift that we can have on this side of heaven: the gift of a Christian life. That's something we all want, right? Do you feel like you have it? **Where does a Christian life come from?**

I.

St. Paul tells us to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. He tells us to bear with one another and to forgive each other. Could you believe that a Christian could ever be hard to live with? We can be, and we need to bear with each other. And we need to forgive each other when we hurt one another. Yes, we Christians do hurt one another because we're still sinners. But the Christian life is characterized by patience and humility, by compassion and gentleness and kindness, which all war against our sinful selfishness. And the Christian life is all about forgiving and bearing with each other. Paul says, **"And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."** Love is the crowning virtue of the Christian life, because love forgives and bears with each other. Love is humble and patient and kind and gentle. Love is the life we are all striving for. Where does it come from?

Paul says, **"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful."** What is the peace of Christ? It's the peace that Christ gives us. It's knowing that we are God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved. It's knowing that God sent his Son to live and die and rise for us and that he then searched us out and found us, among all the billions of people on this earth. When the peace that Christ gives us rules our heart, we don't need to fight for what's ours anymore. We can leave behind selfishness and pride and worry, the things that cause strife. We're at peace with our fellow members and we're kind and gentle and humble.

So how can we let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts? Peace with God comes from knowing that our Savior has died and taken away all that we are guilty of. God has ended our war with him. And that peace overflows into our lives. The peace from Christ is the fruit of faith. How do we get that faith? Paul says, **"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly."** It's that simple. The word of Christ is the gospel, it's the message of God's love and forgiveness through Jesus. That is the source of a real, Christian life. So for us to have peace with God and with each other, the word of Christ needs to dwell in us richly. What does that mean?

It means that it's part of who we are. It's something that we can draw on constantly. So that means we have to learn it, right? That's why we operate a Lutheran elementary school and a Lutheran high school. That's why I teach catechism class and why we offer Sunday school and VBS. But it's also why we have church every

week and on every major church festival. It's why we offer adult Bible class and midweek Bible studies. It's why we encourage you to read your Bibles and do home devotions. The word of Christ needs to dwell in us richly, and not just be in there somewhere.

Sometimes, it seems like we have the idea that if we learned stuff when we were kids, we're good. Many times, when I contact people who are delinquent in their church attendance, they tell that they still believe in Jesus, even if they don't come to church. The message always is that they don't need to come. But can the word of Christ dwell in you richly if you rarely come here? Can it dwell in you richly if you can't remember the last time you opened your Bible? Can it dwell in you richly if you don't keep growing in your faith? You know what I discover over and over again? How easy it is for us to forget what the gospel really means. Why is God going to take you to heaven? Is it because you tried hard to obey the Ten Commandments and to live a decent life while you were here? Is it because you did the best you could? Do you deserve to go to heaven because you took care of your family or because you were a hard worker or even because you went to church every Sunday?

If you think that, then the word of Christ does not dwell in you richly. If you tell God to let you into heaven because you're a good person, then he's going to tell you that the standard to get in is perfection. Have you been perfect? No. And neither have I. So you and I deserve to go to hell. But the gospel says that God is going to let us in anyway because Jesus died and took our sins away. God has forgiven us for Jesus' sake and God has given us faith in him. And when the gospel dwells in us richly, we know that's the reason. We count on that reason. We trust in our Savior to bring us home no matter what.

If you can't come up with that answer on the first try, you need to spend more time in the word so that your faith is clear and strong. Now, I'm not saying you're an unbeliever if you have trouble answering that question. But the word of Christ is not dwelling in us richly when we figure that the pastor isn't going to say anything we haven't already heard. The word of Christ is not dwelling in us richly when we're in the habit of missing church or letting dust collect on our Bibles and we don't even think about it anymore.

Now, obviously, if you're here this morning, chances are, you're here regularly. But it isn't just about being here. It's about a life that's deep in the word. Can any of us claim that we love to come to church every week? Can any of us claim that we don't ever sit in the pew and wish that guy up front would just say "Amen"? Can any of us claim that we never find ourselves drifting away from God? God reminds us this morning of how powerful and dangerous sin really is. The sinful part of us that wants to drift away can lead us to hell.

But Jesus died and paid for the sinner inside us. He died and paid because we are born in rebellion against God and we will have an unbeliever in our hearts for as long as we live here. Jesus died because nothing we do, not even coming to church, is enough to earn heaven. He died and paid for all our sin and then he rose and God has wiped that sin away. We will live with him forever. That's the gospel. And that is the source of the life Paul describes. If you want to be a humble, forgiving, caring Christian, then you need to hear and read and meditate on the word of God, because in the gospel, the Holy Spirit works. God transforms your life. **Where does a Christian life come from? From the Word of Christ dwelling in our hearts.**

II.

St. Paul says, **"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."** Whose job is it, to lead you deeper into the gospel? Certainly, it is my job to do that. Certainly, it's the job of our teachers, especially for the children who they're called to teach. But it isn't only our job. St. Paul told you to teach and admonish one another.

Now, we all know what teaching means. But what does "admonish" mean? The Greek word that St. Paul used here means to win or to instruct or to give counsel as to how to live your life. St. Paul says that you're supposed to teach and counsel each other. Have we forgotten that God gives this job to all of us? Too often, we leave teaching and counseling in the hands of professionals. But Paul told you to do this to each other. How do you do it? With psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Paul's talking about worship. When you lift up your voice and join in the psalms and hymns and liturgy here, you are teaching those around you. Those words have meaning. And you parents are teaching your children that this things matter. Conversely, when you don't or won't sing, what message are you sending your children?

But it isn't just here that you do it. We teach and admonish one another in conversation. How many times have you been embarrassed to talk about Jesus? And we do it in our homes. We all need to make Christ

the center of our home life. Do we do that? Do we pray with our children? Do we teach our kids the word of God? When you drive home from church today, will you ask your children what the sermon was about? What they understood? What it meant?

Why is this hard for us? Are we afraid? The fact that God has established the holy ministry to teach and preach and that we're zealous in combatting false teaching can make us so afraid of saying something wrong that we don't say anything at all. But that's not the only reason. Life is complicated. We have so many responsibilities. It's easy to fall out of the habit of reading the word and coming to church. I know because it happens to me, too. Even though I'm a pastor, sometimes I find that I've let devotions slide in my family. Does that sound at all like your life?

When we shirk our responsibility to teach and admonish each other in our homes and in our lives together as Christians for whatever reason, we sin. But that's why we have a Savior. In all of human history, only one man was ever perfect in proclaiming the gospel. Only one Christian was ever perfect in sharing the good news with the people around him. That one man was Jesus. He was perfect for us. His sharing replaces our failure to share. And his death wipes away all record of our failure. God has forgiven us for all of it.

And in love, God has given every one of us a part in his work of sharing the gospel. If we want to grow in our own Christian lives, if we want our family and our congregation to be humble and kind and giving and forgiving, then we need to take seriously God's command to joyfully share the word. We need to trust that when we do that, no matter how difficult we find it to be and no matter how much we stumble and bumble and trip over our own tongues, the Holy Spirit always works through the gospel. And he will work through our efforts and grow the faith of his people. We pastors can't be everywhere. There will be so many times when a word from you could make all the difference. Trust in God and share that word. **Where does our Christian life come from? It comes from teaching and admonishing one another.**

When I was training for that marathon, I often wondered what was different about those world class runners. What were their bodies really like? A doctor probably could tell you, but I can't. But when it comes to the source of our faith, there is no real difference between pastors and people. We're all sinners. We are all forgiven. God gives the gospel to all of us, to believe and to share. It is true that we pastors have more time to work with the word on a daily basis and we've had the privilege of a special education to delve deeply into it. But that doesn't mean we have more faith than you do. It doesn't mean that God uses us more than he uses you. Your Christian life comes from the gospel. It comes from pastors and members teaching and admonishing you. Hear that gospel, frequently. Study it. Grow in it. And share it with your fellow members here at church and in your own home. Trust God to work through it. Amen.