



Sermon "Put on the New Self"

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Recently, I was given the opportunity to speak at a Probus meeting here at the church. I was asked to talk about my journey as a Portuguese-American from my hometown of Fall River, Massachusetts, to the various countries I came to live. At the end of my talk, I took questions from those attending. One of the questions surprised me and I found it quite challenging to answer.

Someone said, that as I had traveled to various parts of American, Japan, Canada and Thailand before coming to New Zealand, how did I think New Zealanders compared with the other people I had met. This was a tough question because I have only been in New Zealand for such a short time. I am married to a Kiwi, but you learn much more of the culture by living in the country.

I eventually said that I had recognized, especially in shows like Country Calendar, that Kiwis have this "all hands-on deck" approach to work. Everyone should take responsibility for the work that had to get done. I wondered if this aspect of Kiwi-culture originated from farm-life. Everyone must work on the farm especially during the harvest. I even wondered if farm-life has helped shape the value of equality in New Zealand culture as well.

Culture may shape our identity. There is an example of this in the New Testament. Remember the rich young ruler who told Jesus that he wanted to live out his cultural values to the full. He said, "what must I do so that may inherit eternal life?" He asked Jesus, thinking he was only a good teacher of the cultural values that he hoped to follow. He said he obeyed the cultural commandments from his youth but was looking for a way on improving himself. This rich young ruler was a model of living out Jewish cultural values.

Jesus said that there was one thing the young man lacked. He said, "go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Mark 10). It must have been so difficult to be un-Jewish in some sense and follow someone you consider just as a good teacher. How do you let go of being Jewish to be something else? How does an American or a Kiwi let go of their cultural identity and follow Jesus?

Paul, in letter to the church in Colossae says, that followers of Jesus are no longer Gentiles or Jews, slaves or free, they are a new creation in Christ. The old selves that found their identity in the cultures where they were raised were dead. In its place was a new identity in Jesus. Paul says that the church was now to live out this new identity which the Spirit of God was trying to glory in them. Let's unpack how Paul does this.

1.) Old Self v. New Self

Paul tells his brothers and sisters another reason for not following the lofty religious laws of others. No matter how lofty people may be in their own eyes or in the eyes of others, no one is seated at the right hand of God. And Paul says to the believers in Colossae that they have been raised with Christ and now their life is hidden with Christ in heaven at the right hand of God! Who needs to follow human beings who have a good religious CV when believers have direct relational access with God?

Paul says to set their minds on heaven. They are children of God! In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul expounded on this. He said, "The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God...no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received (from Jesus) is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us...(Paul summarizes his point saying,)...we have the mind of Christ. And when Christ appears again, we will know him just as he knows us.

The church's hiddenness in Christ is their new self. Paul tells the church not to meddle in earthly matters of boasting, positioning or self-glory. Paul says put on this new self which is united with Jesus in heaven! The church doesn't need an advocate to approach the Kingdom of Heaven. They are already hidden in Christ having access to the very thoughts of God by His Spirit. Every believer has access to the mind of God through Jesus so all are equal. There is no other master or teacher to follow. There is no difference, no matter how religiously disciplined people are, no matter how famous they are in their communities. As citizens in heaven there is no Gentile or Jew, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all (1 Corinthians 2).

2.) Example of New Self

In Colossians 3:12–14, Paul says as equal citizens of heaven, all having direct access to God's thoughts, God's life by the Holy Spirit, each person in the church is to clothe themselves with this new life in Christ. The Spirit is calling them to show the life of Jesus within the Church so that the world may see his compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. If the church doesn't put on this new self in Christ, they will be living their lives on their own. They will be living lives under the power of their own flesh which is wasting away due to the effects of sin.

It is important that the church realize that they cannot bear with one another or forgive one another if they are living just by the power of their flesh. Paul isn't saying to the church that they must try harder and become more disciplined. Telling a church that they should forgive and "put on love" would seem to be too heavy a burden to take seriously! How can people, in their own strength, relying only on themselves, produce the love and humility Paul is asking? They can love and forgive if they put on the new self which is hidden in Christ. They are united with Christ and Paul says elsewhere, "For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God...the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Romans 8).

I think it's worth noting here the difficulty the church may face in putting on this new self. Paul can call the church to live out their new identity as children of God, but we can recognize that it's not always easy to let go of life in the flesh. The author of the book of James points out why the church finds it difficult to let go of the flesh.

He said that the quarrels and fights among the church were due to the passions that were at war within them. Churches that are angry or ashamed of what's happening within them may throw themselves into religious disciplines in order to be seen by others as good and a model worth following. But if the church won't address the passions that were at war within them they would never be able to put on the new self, hidden in Christ.

Surprisingly, psychiatrist, Jung said that the only source of religious experience with God was through self-knowledge. He said,

...when an individual is willing to fulfil the demands of rigorous self-examination and self-knowledge...(they) will not only discover some important truths about (themselves), but will also have gained a psychological advantage: (they) will have succeeded in deeming (themselves) worthy of serious attention and sympathetic interest...(this could be seen as) a declaration of (their) own human

dignity and...the first step towards the foundations of (their) consciousness – that is, towards the unconscious, the only accessible source of religious experience. This is certainly not to say that what we call the unconscious is identical with God or is set up in his place. It is the medium from which the religious experience seems to flow.

Putting on the new self in Christ, is allowing the Spirit of God to show us the passions that war within us so that we might truly know ourselves apart from God. It is then that we might reach out, knowing acutely what lies within us, and cling to love of God offered to us in His Son. We might then, with thankful hearts, rejoice in our union with him.

3.) Example of New Selves

In Colossians 3:15–17, Paul tells the church that they are all to put on their new selves in Christ so that they might be one. This was what Jesus had prayed for. In the book of John, Jesus is seen praying to the Father, “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17).

Paul was holding everyone in the church responsible to put on their new lives in Christ so that they would glorify the peace and unity Jesus purchased for them. The church was to use the gifts given to them, by the Spirit, to encourage all to live out the glory of Jesus that they all shared. They were to teach and admonish one another with gratitude in their hearts.

Whatever each person in the church said or did was to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus. They were hidden in Christ and called to live out that union for all to see. They were called to encourage everyone to be unified with Jesus. All their actions and words were to be used to make followers of the Lord Jesus. The church in Colossae could hardly miss Paul’s points. They were to reject religious law as unworthy of their consideration. The church had direct union with Christ in heaven and the Spirit he gave them would guide and empower them to show the glory of Jesus they were united to. For Paul, the church in Colossae was a family of equals, each given union with Christ but a gift to share with each other as well. Those gifts were given to glorify the life of Jesus through his body, the Church.

What is our application for today?

1.) Put on New Self

I’d like to speak to the younger members of the church although this message is for everyone. But I’d like to speak directly to the younger crowd. You know, those in their 50s! I know that you are busy with your family and career commitments. I know that you think you have no capacity to commit to anything else. And that may be true.

But make sure you put on your new self in Jesus. Set your minds on him in heaven. What is he calling you to do in the church? I don’t think it’s important that you listen to what others may want you to do. It isn’t important that you listen to me right now! But, is your heart set on heavenly matters? Is your heart set on every word Jesus may speak to you through the Spirit? What is he calling you to do in respect to the church? Pray to him, submit to him and walk in the power he gives you to reveal that you no longer do things on your own but only with the power you have as a child of God.

2.) Be Equals

We are all equals in Christ. He speaks directly to each of us who desire to follow him. What does this mean? It means that no matter how many experiences you have had in the past, you can't tell people what to do. Only one person can tell us what to do. There is only one teacher. There is only one Lord. We can, as brothers and sisters, appeal to others, but we have to leave others to walk their journey with their Lord.

There is the account where Jesus directs Peter to teach and serve the disciples. Peter then turns to see a disciple who was close to Jesus and Peter asks what was to happen to him. Jesus tells him not be concerned regarding the call Jesus gives to others. Jesus brings Peter's focus back to himself and says, "You must follow me."

If someone comes into the church and in their own walk with the Lord, where they are developmentally as a disciple, they worship with music that you find to repetitive or simplistic, don't judge and discourage them from worshipping. Put on your new self, hidden in Christ, and encourage them to worship with all of their hearts. We are all equals before the Lord. He speaks directly to every follower. There is no distinction between seasoned followers and new followers. All are one in Christ.

3.) Share Your Gifts

This last application is really for me. I've learned much from our Lord during my short time with you. I'm embarrassed to say that, before, I had been too inactive in the church, before pastoring here at MBC. Don't get me wrong, I have always served in some capacity, but there have been times when I go to the church not thinking of giving immediately to needs that arise. Instead, I usually tried to protect my time by avoiding too much commitment.

If someone comes to the church, reach out to them and give them your time and gifts. You don't have to change their mind or even be liked. We are all called to give, to share what we have with each other and leave the results to others in their own walk with Jesus.

In all of these, make sure you put on your new self in Jesus. Walk as children of God empowered with the life of Jesus through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Your new self is union with God: Father, Son and Spirit. Never live your life on your own, in your own strength.