

New Clothes

Series: Living the Vision: Pathways of Peace, Colossians 3: 12-17, Isaiah 1: 12-17

Quit your worship charades. I can't stand your trivial religious games: while you go right on sinning! No matter how long or loud or often you pray, I'll not be listening and do you know why? Because you've been tearing people to pieces and your hands are bloody. Go home and wash up. Clean up your act say no to wrong. Learn to do good. Work for justice. Help the down-and-out. Stand up for the homeless. Go to bat for the defenseless. (Isaiah 1: 12-17)

These words from the prophet Isaiah were critical of the religious practice of his people. Their worship was hollow and disconnected from real life, from the needs and suffering of so many of their neighbors. Isaiah was talking about *Shalom*, that big picture vision that guides our efforts to be church here at Crossroads. We are attempting to live, as Isaiah was calling his people to do nearly 3000 years ago, in Sync with the underlying truth of the universe, in Sync with the nature of God.

Shalom means peace. This vision sees people as intimately connected with each other and with God. We face the question of how to live in that large vision, each of us individually and this body as church. How will we work for *Shalom* for all people and all of life? It's not an easy question to answer and it's really hard to live into an honest answer.

Shalom is actually a very subversive idea. Life in *Shalom* goes against the grain of our culture, and often against the culture of being church. Sometimes it means to stand against what everybody knows is right or to push against common sense. It can mean to step over socially accepted boundaries. It always means standing in the flow of the Spirit and setting your vision far beyond what is comfortable, what is secure, and even what is safe.

One New Testament writer, possibly the Apostle Paul, describes this vision of *Shalom* in the letter to the Colossians (3: 12-14)

Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Throughout this Lenten teaching series, we've been exploring ways of living in the large vision of *Shalom*. Living *Shalom* includes living on a journey, seeing life as pilgrimage rather than a scenic tour. To do this is to risk discovering your self, your own calling, your own yearning for God to match God's yearning for you.

Shalom includes living with people in community, in what New Testament Christians called *koinonia*, a community in and of the Spirit. This is our goal at Crossroads Church. Membership is not a commitment to a particular theology, style of worship, or form of governance. It is a commitment to this community.

Shalom includes living in such a way as to produce the fruit of the Spirit in your life. This fruit of the Spirit is: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. It's *not just holding these as ideals in our heads or sentiments in our hearts, but working out their implications in every detail of our lives.*

Shalom includes how we clothe ourselves. Last Sunday, Bob Rockford told us to "put on the whole armor of God." We get dressed that way in order to face the challenges of life by

faith. We do that in order to do battle as non-violent warriors engaged in a spiritual battle against the very real evil around us.

Today, we'll continue this theme of getting dressed "in the wardrobe God [has] picked out for [us]," the wardrobe of *Shalom*. It includes compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, and discipline. Accessories include being even-tempered, content with second place, and quick to forgive an offense. And the most important item of clothing is love. Always put on love. Let the [*Shalom*], the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other and in step with each other. You'll always be dressed for success in *Shalom* each day.

Who doesn't love to get new clothes, a new outfit, perhaps even a whole new wardrobe? It can help us feel renewed – rejuvenated. The clothes we choose to wear, whether formal or casual, constitute one of the important images of ourselves we put out there to the world. Before people know who we are or anything else about us, they know what they see in our clothing.

For the most part, our clothing reveals how we want to be seen by others and the image we want to project. It probably reflects a lot about our general life attitudes. This image of clothing is a common biblical image about the spiritual life and has to do with attitude, values, and priorities reflected in our lifestyles and our actions. It is a measure of the things we value, the priorities that govern our choices, and the ways we interact with different people. I suspect that how we dress, then, also affects how and what we see in the world around us.

How would you describe the outfit, perhaps the life wardrobe, you've put together? What is the message you want others to see in your life? Are you satisfied with this image? Do you like it? What would you prefer to be wearing? Are you dressing with compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, patience, and discipline? Are people seeing a vision of *Shalom* in you?

Each of us has the responsibility to dress ourselves, to choose the behaviors, actions, and lifestyle choices that reflect our honest values, priorities, and attitudes. The community of church exists, at least in part, to help each of us come to understand the values of God evidenced in Jesus and to embrace them as our own.

It's up to you and me, and us, to find the balance in our lives: how much is enough? What do we need for our lives to be full and meaningful without having too much so that our lives are distracted, self-absorbed, or superficial. How much do we value being able to contribute to the welfare of others and the improvement of our world and its people? These are choices each of us can and must make. They are the clothes we wear.

Take care in choosing your wardrobe. It affects how the world sees you. It also affects how you see the world. I know that's true for me. Sometimes I try to dress in the latest style, trying to emulate my friends or other people I think are cool. When I do that, I find it difficult to resist other attitudes of the crowd. It's easier to value what they value and to disregard what they disregard. The more important it is for me to dress like them, the harder it is to be myself and even to know myself.

Sometimes, I dress up really well, maybe wear a tuxedo or a nice suit. I feel special. I can even feel a little insulated, in a fantasy world of affluence. When I wear nice and expensive clothes, the presence of someone who is dirty or smelly, maybe a street person, threatens to intrude into my fantasy. I resent their presence, seeing them as more of a threat to my nice clothes than as a fellow human being who perhaps needs my attention.

Sometimes I dress very casually. I feel comfortable in my own little world – insulated, safe, and anonymous. What I do doesn't really matter in the larger world? I don't really affect anyone else. It's just about me.

I am compelled by the biblical message and by my own sense of conscience to ask, “Am I dressed in such a way that I will see both the beauty and the brokenness around me? Does my clothing lead me to identify with marginalized people? Do I acknowledge injustice and suffering and confess my part in a way of living that is just not working for so many people.

Is our society wearing a status quo that is working hard to tune out voices of poverty, bigotry, an increasing inequity of wealth in the hands of a few? Are our churches, who purport to be following Jesus, divide and exclude people in order to fill our buildings and preserve a sense of being right? To dress that way, to live that way, is not Shalom. That is not the vision of God, of Moses, Jeremiah, or of Jesus. That is not the vision that guides this congregation committed to inclusion.

We invite people to “come as you are.” That means dress as you want as long as your outfit reflects *Shalom* -- welcoming All. And make sure that’s not just your Sunday outfit. Every day we are Church – Christians every moment of our lives.

Dressing for success in following Jesus means seeing the brokenness around us. It also means seeing the beauty in the world, in community, and in our lives, not just on Sunday and not just here. The author of Colossians reminds us cultivate thankfulness.

“Let the Word of Christ— the Message [the vision of Shalom] have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Sing your hearts out to God! Let every detail in your lives— words, actions, whatever— be done in the name of Jesus, thanking God every step of the way.” What a way to be dressed for today!