

Emmaus Road Mennonite  
December 27, 2009  
Anita Rediger

**“And be thankful...”**

Recently, Marie and I had a good laugh about clothing. I was commenting on her festive outfit of last Sunday and she exclaimed, “Oh, I had a wardrobe crisis today!” It certainly appeared to me that the crisis had passed – she looked great!- and.., even though it’s never good to have a “wardrobe crisis,” we laughed, thankful that she didn’t have a “wardrobe malfunction!”

Yesterday’s reading from the “*Rejoice*” states, “It has been said that you stop believing in Santa Claus when you start getting clothes for Christmas.” Did any of you receive articles of clothing as gifts?? Did any of you *risk* giving such gifts??!!

“Many people who opened boxes with sweaters and shirts yesterday are standing in line today at customer service desks, receipt in hand, ready to exchange gifts for the right size and style. To many, clothing seems to personal to be chosen for you by someone else, especially by your Aunt Phyllis. Clothing is self-expression: We are what we wear...In his own way, Paul agrees with this.” Leonard Beechy in Dec.26,2009 *Rejoice*

So, it’s interesting (& risky) that one of the readings for this first Sunday following Christmas Day is about none other than” clothing!” Colossians Chapter 3: 12 “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, *clothe yourselves...* “get dressed, be dressed...”

In the verses prior to Mia’s reading of this morning, Paul celebrates the incredible gift of Jesus to humanity, to all of creation. Listen to the words chosen to describe God’s gift to us: Jesus - “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.” Jesus - in whom, “all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible... and maybe my favorite of all - Jesus, “God’s mystery...that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” Col. 2:2fff

Jesus is a gift. As with any gift, God’s gift of incarnation is ours to receive... This year, I’ve been very aware of how difficult it is for me to receive gifts. Gifts...I often feel self-conscious upon receipt, hesitant, or maybe be too shy to even open them! It’s easy for me to leave packages unopened. My mother shakes her head! There’s probably all sorts of strange psychological reasons this is so, but that’s another topic! Yet, I’ve been wondering – could it be that I’ve also been holding the gift of Jesus “at arms length” too?! Or at least, I’ve been cautious about receiving the fullness of this gift!

Instead of hesitancy, Paul encourages hearty receipt of Jesus as the Lord...and with abundant thanksgiving. Thanksgiving – because, as is recorded in Col.2:8, no longer are we “captive” to “philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to

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the elemental spirits...Paul expresses and bids us respond with thanksgiving - for in Jesus the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." (Emmanual!)

Released from "captivity" we are invited to "put on Christ." Released from "captivity" we're invited to strip off the old self (false self)(prison garb of deceit, greed, hatred, fear...) with its practices & behaviors and to clothe ourselves with the new self (real self!)... according to the image of its creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all in all! Col. 3:5ff

Now, back to the idea of clothes as Christmas gifts!! Actually, it seems that Paul might have been the first to market such an idea!

Paul invites the followers of Jesus to clothe themselves with "a new self" (I would call this the "real self" as in the same sentence Paul says, "Don't lie to one another...which usually begins with telling ourselves the truth!) Paul invites the followers of Jesus to clothe *themselves* with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience...and above all to clothe *themselves* with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. In this invitation, we hear echoes of the baptismal words of Galatians 3:28...to be clothed with Christ...literally practiced by some baptismal candidates; the changing of old outer garments for new ones as a sign of their reunion with God as followers of Jesus.

As I considered this imagery, I found myself thinking about our daily task of getting dressed. At this stage of life, "getting dressed" is something that I do without too much effort. However, at different times in life, "getting dressed" is definitely something that we need help with. When Aden comes to visit – sometimes early in the morning – still in his pj's - I enjoy helping him get dressed. This time of year, I think of school teachers who supervise the putting on of snow pants and boots at recess time. And at Swiss Village "getting dressed" is an integral part of the care-giver's role- each and every day!

As we've just heard, twice Paul encourages the believers to "clothe yourselves." Reading this, first off, I simply thought of getting myself clothed, but then it struck me – this isn't just a word to isolated individuals! These are social virtues, not simply attributes of individual piety! Certainly, as much as possible, I am responsible to get myself dressed, but that's not always possible. Several in our fellowship know the challenge of getting dressed following surgery!

I believe that we're invited by this scripture to help each other "get dressed..." on ordinary occasions or when we fuss over one another as we dress for special celebrations – straightening a tie, or tucking in a tag. As members of the body of Christ we are called to help one another to clothe ourselves – physically when need be, but also...helping one

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another be clothed with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience...above all we are to help each other put on love – which binds everything together in the *bond of perfection*. (KJV)

In conclusion, Paul writes, “And be thankful...”

And why wouldn't we be thankful? We have each other! We aren't left alone with bags of strange, new clothes. We aren't on our own to fasten out-of-reach hooks and eyes or to negotiate tricky button holes. We aren't being asked to wear miserable, ill-fitting clothing.

This invitation is not to life in a hair-shirt (or to a life of faith that feels like too-tight shoes or a binding waistband!) Instead, we're being offered an entire wardrobe of comfortable, wash-n-wear clothing. And so what if they get dirty or stretched out! That's what they're made for!

We have each other to help us select the garments that are best suited for us and for our life together as followers of Jesus. We have each other to help mend tears and make necessary alterations as our “shape” changes. And what a tender opportunity it is. Just think about those who help us when we need assistance with our physical wardrobe... parent, spouse, friend, care-giver – each one an intimate, trusting relationship. In our life together as the Emmaus Road Mennonite Fellowship, we have this same kind of opportunity. Daily, we nurture supportive, caring and trusting relationships with one another; relationships which help us to “put on love.”

Brothers and sisters, as we gather at the manger in these days following Christmas, may we continue to celebrate the coming of the Jesus – God with us... and let's take a look at what we're wearing. Let's put on, with thanksgiving, the gift of beautiful, well-fitting garments - the garments of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience...and above all – love - which binds everything together in perfect harmony. These are the right ones for us. No wardrobe crisis! No return receipts needed!

“Whatever we do, in word or deed, may we do everything through the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to the God the Father through him!” Thanks be to God...that “Love came down at Christmas!” AMEN

Alexis and Ashley sing “Love came down” HWB #208

“Love came down at Christmas, love all lovely,

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love divine.  
Love was born at Christmas -  
star and angels gave the sign.  
Sing noel, sing noel, sing noel  
Worship we the Godhead, love incarnate,  
love divine.  
Worship we our Jesus –  
what shall be our sacred sign?

Love shall be our token, love be yours and love be mine,  
love to God and neighbor,  
love for prayer and gift and sign....”

To be used in the call to communion:

Barbara Brown Taylor: *An Altar in the World – A Geography of Faith*, writes,

"The daily practice of incarnation - of being in the body with full confidence that God speaks the language of flesh-is to discover a pedagogy that is as old as the gospels. Why else did Jesus spend his last night on earth teaching his disciples to wash feet and share supper? With all the conceptual truths in the universe at his disposal, he did not give them something to think about together when he was gone. Instead, he gave them concrete things to do - specific ways of being together in their bodies - that would go on teaching them what they needed to know when he was no longer around to teach them.”

Sending Words:

Dear brothers and sisters, go out!  
Cradling in our hearts  
the great mystery  
of reconciling love.

May it take root and flourish,  
within us, among us and beyond us-  
because of Jesus – “God with us!”  
AMEN