

**Christ Presbyterian Church**  
**Edina, Minnesota**  
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**Debbie Manning**  
**Christ In Us | Colossians 3:15-17**

Well good morning, everyone! I'm Debbie Manning and I'm part of the Congregational Care team. I'm the one who got us started late today and the only thing I can say is, I've shared with you guys about preach week and you know what I'm like—I'm in the zone, I was in the zone—so my apologies for getting us started late. We are in the Book of Colossians. It's been a 5-6 week series and John will be bringing it home next week, and this book, this letter from Paul, is written from a prison in Rome. The first half of the letter is really about who Christ is, how He works, what He's done for us. And the second half is really about us, how we're to do, how we're to look as new creations in Christ. As only God will do, He always sort of gives me a last minute thought, and yesterday at 4:00AM, I woke up and had this memory of our daughter Annie at three-years-old playing "Go Fish". We were a big game playing family, and that year when she was three, we played a lot of Go Fish. And Annie Manning, whenever it was her turn, she would pick up the card and say, "Do you have a fish that look like tthhhis?" And of course, as only God can do, He tied it for me in this way: the question that I ask myself and I'm going to ask you guys today during our text—do I have a *faith* that looks like this? Now, I'm not going to ask you guys to think about today during our text, "Do I have a faith that look like this?" And I'm not going to ask you guys to ask yourselves, "Do I have a faith that look like tthhhis?" But I will ask you to keep that in mind as we talk about this text, this letter from Paul.

So last week John talked about this idea that we're a new creation in Christ. We take off the old and we put on the new. And how do we do that? We do that by putting on the clothing of God and that looks like kindness, and humility, and gentleness, and patience, and this ability to forgive one another. And I'm going to jump off right where John left off. We're going to be in chapter three of this letter to the Colossians, verses 15-17, so if you have a Bible grab it. Otherwise it will be up on the screen.

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 message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 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 3:15-17]

There's a British pastor, Stephen Sizer, who summed up that passage up with three basic steps that we can use to follow Jesus. And this is what he said:

1. Let the peace of Christ rule your heart
2. Let the word of Christ shape your mind
3. Let the name of Christ determine all of your actions

And I think that's a phenomenal outline that we could take from this passage and use when we are working toward following Jesus. But today, I really wanted to spend our time in verse 15 because there's so much there for us and I think it's very timely. John touched on it during the announcements. This has been a very disturbing week on many levels for us with the shootings in Orlando and some of the political ridiculousness that's going on around us. It's been disturbing and I think more than that it's been divisive to our oneness, to our community, it's been divisive to the work that God is doing in the world. And the more I thought about it this weekend, I prayed about it, this realization came to me: This is not a time for theology, this is not a time for our opinions and pointing fingers, this is a time for us to be the church. That's what we're called to—to be the church—and that's what Paul is talking about. This is what it looks like to be the church. Let the peace of Christ rule your hearts since as members of one body you were called to peace. Let's be the church.

What I wanted to look at today is: what does Paul mean by this exactly? It makes me think about hermeneutics—the study of interpretation of scripture. In hermeneutics what you find out is, it's all about context, context, context. I'll never forget the first day of hermeneutics and when I walked out of class, honest to goodness, I was freaked out! Oh my goodness! There is a lot more to this studying of God's word than meets the eye. What was the original author's intent to the original audience? All of this is swirling in my head and I'm thinking, for years and years, I've been trusting John Crosby to interpret this for me, and I should and truly I did walk away being grateful for someone who interprets with intelligence, and integrity, and heart, and I mean that. That's important: we stand on God's word. But when you look at hermeneutics you look at the verse within the passage, within the book, within the Old Testament or the New Testament and then within the whole metanarrative of Scripture. God's story, God's work in the world and this metanarrative of Scripture is reconciliation, it's God making things right between He and us, between us and one another, and that's the shalom that's going to be the overarching narrative of what we're going to be talking about today. And it all comes out of God's love for His creation. And then there is this arc that changes everything for us, and it's the arc of the movement from word to flesh. That's what Paul is talking about, that's the message that he's trying to get through to the church in Colossae, and what he's saying is that following Jesus isn't a new religious experience, it's what John talked about: becoming a new creation. And the sign of new creation in a community is love—a love that binds us together as one. I think that's a great place to start as we look at this verse and using a little of our hermeneutics, we're going to reach

back just one verse to Colossians 3:14 where Paul connects all things together.

14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect unity. [Colossians 3:14]

Certainly that verse is reaching back to what John spoke about—tying all those virtues together, but it's also reaching forward as he moves into the text that we just read—this idea that we're called to a peace that unifies. One of the things I think is super cool is that Paul always leads with love and then moves to peace. We see it again in Ephesians:

2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.  
3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.  
[Ephesians 4:2-3]

So Paul's message to the Colossian church, and to us, is that this is what we're called to, and it comes out of a love that brings us together, that connects us as one. Now, we're going to get clarification on this—what Paul really means—and we're going to look at Colossians 3:11.

11 Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. [Colossians 3:11]

What Paul is saying is that in the Body of Christ, there are no divisions between slave or free, Greek or Jew. He appeals to the idea that we're to be in unity; we are one body characterized by all those virtues: forgiveness, humility, gentleness. Then he adds that harmony and peace should be the rule that guides all of our relationships. That's what this verse is all about. Peace should be what rules our hearts.

15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. [Colossians 3:15]

I love the first word—"LET". Doesn't that just shout that you have a choice in this? Doesn't it scream that you need to own this? Christ has done so much for us, but we have a part in this. An obedient part. Let. Let's allow that to happen—this peace that Christ gives to us. The peace that Paul is talking about is a shalom, a completeness, a fullness. He's not talking about the peace where we feel good about everything, that life is good. It doesn't have to do with circumstances or with whether we're agreeing or disagreeing. It's a peace that unifies us with Him and one another. That's what he's talking about, so we let the peace of Christ rule. We let it rule and the Greek word for rule is {brab-yoo"-o}. Right now I'm picturing my Greek professor cringing like he normally did when I used Greek, but what that word means is to rule, to govern, to judge, to preside. What it means for us, and it harkens back to the "let", is that it's a decision. It's a decision we make to let peace rule and lead our heart.

You know, I have a spiritual director and a couple of years ago she talked to me about adding some rules of life to my life so that I could be the best pastor, and wife, and mom

and all these things that God calls me to be. And I think about that in this verse: what are our rules of life and what if one of them was to make sure that peace ruled our heart in every relationship, in every conversation? That would certainly bring about unity. That's what this passage is about: a peace that leads to unity. The peace of Christ is to be over everything in our life. I want to clarify that to live by this rule doesn't mean we're going to be in agreement with everyone. We will continue to disagree, we'll continue to feel conflict, but what it means is that we, as Jesus followers, are called to work together despite our differences. That's what it means. And the kind of unity that Paul is calling us to is a unity that allows for equal voices, a unity that has mutual respect for one another, and a unity that allows a place at the table for everybody.

Now, I think we all know that's a heck of a lot easier said than done. And I can tell you this is a place that God continues to grow me. I'm anticipating to the end of my days here on earth that I will never quite get this, but it was never so clear to me as to how much I needed to grow in this whole idea of letting Christ's peace rule in my heart as when I got involved in the Living in the Tension ministry. A few years ago, there was a bunch of us that felt called to this ministry of building a bridge between the church and the LGBT community. And I'm just going to say this upfront: this is a hard conversation. It causes a lot of conflict and angst, but it's an important conversation. So in this ministry we had people come on Sunday nights from all different spaces around this issue. None of us saw things exactly the same way, but what we did agree on was that we love Jesus and we're all trying to follow Jesus. And in those first months I will confess that I would often walk out with a lot of confusion and pain and angst in my heart because I didn't see it quite the same way as some of the other people. Over the months we listened to each other, and continued to know each other and see each other's hearts, and slowly and surely we became one. We still stood on different sides of the issue, but we realized that was okay because what was important is that we were unified. We were unified in the love, and peace, and grace of Christ and it was not easy, but we all felt called to it. And we need to remember that unity doesn't happen by accident. It doesn't happen with a minimal amount of effort and sacrifice, because things will continue to try your patience. You will continue to say things you probably shouldn't have said—I know I do. We'll lash out, we'll do things that are divisive, we'll argue, we'll hold on to grudges. There will be times where in our minds we'll continue to go over and over and over again all the short-comings of our brothers and sisters. That's when we need to remind ourselves of the sacrifice of Christ and the effort put forth by God to bring us into "one body" because if Christ's sacrifice is important to us, then being one body has to be, too. They go hand in hand.

I believe that God has planted a deep longing for peace in our hearts and that inevitably we all break that shalom. I think when that happens it's mostly on us. It's mostly because we're not in touch with that giver of peace. We're not centered in that giver of peace, but how might we do that? I'm going to go back to what John said last week in his message and it holds true with this. You want to let peace rule your heart? Then you

better be in prayer, because we need to be connected to the source. You want peace to rule your heart? We better be self-aware, because the question we need to ask in our awareness is what rules us? Is it the love of God? What guards the entrance to your hearts? What is the sentry standing guard? Is it fear? Hatred? Pride? Or is it the peace of God? And just like John said last week, that third peace is community. We need to be in community. We need to be holding each other accountable; challenging each other in our oneness to hang on to this peace of Christ. And I'm going to add something. I'm going to add a fourth piece: I think we need to put aside our pride and be willing to meet people where they're at. Find the common ground. Be a listener instead of being so worried about putting our opinion forward or what we believe forward. Let's listen to one another.

You know, that was a lesson I learned in our first year of marriage. Our first year was challenging. We did a bit of fighting and about a year in, all of a sudden it occurred to me—it must have been a God thing because I don't think I would have been able to come up with it at 22-years-old—*wait a second! This isn't about winning. This isn't about who's got to be right. We are on the same team. We are for one another. We want to be the best whole we can be together.* And that changed everything. Now, not that we don't fight once-in-a-while, but at least there's some understanding around we are one. God calls us to peace, and whether it's in our personal relationships, our communities, our families, or the world, He calls us to that kind of peace because people whose minds are ruled by the peace of Christ refuse to accept any idea, any course of action that's not in line with Christ's idea of unity, unity for His community, and I love that.

So here's the bottom line everybody: when Christians need to make a decision, when we need to make a choice, the peace that Christ produces in our hearts has to be the determining factor. It has to be. We have a God who believes in one body and He will not endorse nor will He accept a divided Christianity. That's just a truth—a truth we need to know, and understand, and work toward.

So last week John said belief isn't enough. We need to look different. Paul tells us about what needs to rule our heart. And we need to lead with a peace that unifies. I'm going to finish off with just a little bit of a last sermon that Rob Bell gave before he left Mars Hill because I think it sums up perfectly what Paul has for us today.

“As if belief, getting the word right, is the highest form of faith. Jesus came to give us life. A living, breathing, throbbing, pulsating blow your hair back, tingle your spine, roll the windows down and drive fast, experience of God right here, right now. Word taking on flesh and blood. And so you've found yourself defending and explaining and trying to find the words for your experience that is fundamentally about a reality that is beyond and more than words. So when you find yourselves tied up in knots, having long discussions about who believes what, a bit like dogs doing that sniff circle when they meet on the sidewalk, do this: take out a cup and some bread and put it in the middle of the table, and say

a prayer and examine yourselves, and then you make sure everybody's rent is paid, and there's food in their fridge and clothes on their backs, and then invite everybody to say 'yes' to the resurrected Christ with whatever 'yes' they can muster in the moment. And then you take that bread and you dip it into the cup in the ancient/future hope, and trust that there is a new creation bursting forth right here right now, and then together taste that new life and liberation and forgiveness. And as you look those people in the eyes gathered around that table from all walks of life, and you see the new humanity, sinners saved by grace, beggars who have found bread showing the others beggars where they found it, remind yourselves that this is what you believe. Remember, the movement is word to flesh.

Gosh, I love that. The movement is word to flesh. Well, my Annie is now a 25-year-old married woman, and when I think back on those tender moments when she was a sweet 3-year-old and that sweet voice saying, "Do you have a fish that look like tthhhis?" It does make me ask the question: do I have a faith that looks like this? One centered in this Christ who saved me, who died for me, who did that for all of us, who calls us into peace, a peace that unifies us. Do I have a faith that looks like Christ in me? Let's pray.

Holy and gracious God, we are so grateful that You are a God that loves us so much that You came to earth, the word became flesh and dwelt among us and it changed everything. We are new in You, Christ, and we are forever grateful. Help us to be people who let Your peace rule our hearts and all that we say and do, all this in Your holy name. Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*