

# Mothering Sunday: Colossians 3:12-17

22nd March 2020. Sermon by Sarah Smart

Good morning everyone. I hope you're all doing ok and are enjoying doing church in a slightly different way today. It feels like so much has changed since i started preparing this talk. We find ourselves in a challenging time where most of our normal routines and familiar habits have all of a sudden disappeared. This is the first Sunday of many where we won't be able to meet together in person, but i know that Russ and the team are working on lots of ways that we can still connect together as a church family. It seems particularly strange not to be together today as we celebrate Mothering Sunday, and i'm so sorry that we're not able to give out gifts to all the ladies in the church. However, i still believe that we can encounter God together as we worship and listen to His word from our own homes, and i'm praying that the message that He has given me to share is as relevant to you in your home as it would be if we were all sitting together in the worship area at church.

When i was first led to the reading that we are going to focus on today, i had in my mind that God was speaking to me and our church about some of the characteristics of God and Christianity that should be present in our lives. I had in my mind some ideas of women in the Bible who are incredible examples to us all about what it means to live a life dedicated to God, pointing people to Him by the way they lived their lives. I read the passage and was reflecting on it, challenged to see more of the characteristics of God in my personality as i navigate life as a Mum. As i read the passage now in light of our present reality, i can see that God has all of that and so much more to say! Lets read the passage together and seek God as to what He wants to say to us this morning.

## **Colossians 3:12-17 New International Version (NIV)**

**12** 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 one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. 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 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.

*This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.*

Wow, what a picture and vision of the impact of God at work in our lives. Paul, the writer of the letter of Colossians, is taking the characteristics of God that were given as titles to the people of Israel in the Old Testament, and boldly giving them to the local church in Colossae. In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel were called God's chosen people, and now Paul is using this term for anyone who joins the local church! This transfer of Israel's titles to the church shows the complete change of thinking that had happened in Paul's mind after his encounter with Jesus. God's love and life-changing power is available to all, not just a select few. Paul uses the image of clothing to describe the depths of what it is to love in a household and a community, and what it is to put that love into practical action. Tom Wright rephrases it like this: 'be tender-hearted, kind, humble, meek and ready to put up with anything'.

I've been wondering, how many times have i demonstrated these characteristics over the last week? How often have i been indifferent instead of compassionate, mean instead of kind, proud instead of humble, harsh instead of gentle, agitated instead of patient? How have i demonstrated forgiveness and love? The thing is that all of the characteristics that are mentioned in that Colossians passage take intentional choices to put them into action. As Paul says, they are like clothes to put on. Getting dressed takes effort, some days more than others!! Worn well, clothing becomes second nature, and like your favourite shoes you hardly know you have them on. Paul invites his hearers to think of what they choose to wear and why. As a body they will express the

love of God when they consciously practise it, and when it dwells in them. Very often when we are feeling tired, overwhelmed or fearful, these are not the characteristics that are naturally demonstrated. Take, for example, the scenes that we have seen in our supermarkets over the last week. As it has become more clear about the actions that need to be taken in order to fight Coronavirus, people have taken to panic buying and clearing the shelves of everything. In the midst of fear, it is so easy to resort to selfishness rather than generosity. I've felt it myself - on Monday I went to the supermarket and the shelves had been cleared of nappies. There were none, and we were getting dangerously low at home. I decided to go on a bit of a supermarket tour to try and find some and when I found some in stock it took all my might to only buy one pack instead of the three that were left on the shelf. Why? Because fear was driving my response rather than confidence in God and His provision for our family. I thoroughly learnt my lesson because later that day we had three phone calls from various people in church who had all been on the look out for nappies and had found some more for us! God is good and He knows what we need. Paul is keen to tell us that the love of God will protect us, sustain us and warm us, especially in situations where we are under the greatest strain.

So, on this Mothering Sunday, what spiritual clothes do I intentionally need to be putting on so that my reactions reflect the love of God? What attributes of God do we want our households to be radiating as we navigate this new season? What spiritual clothes do we need to be intentional about wearing over the coming weeks? As we reflect more of the characteristics of God, our environments change. By the way that we respond to different situations, the world can be changed. We can experience this on a small scale in our own homes, and in bigger ways in our communities, towns and countries. I know that at home, if I forget to lean in to God and depend on Him for my strength then I end up reacting in negative ways and that can breed a negative atmosphere and affect the whole course of our day. If I am responding to the boys with compassion, kindness and patience, then their behaviour is affected for the better because of that. Over the last week there have been examples of this happening on a larger scale as communities across the world have been living with the effects of the self-isolation that Coronavirus has brought with it. The Italians took to their balconies and started singing, acts of kindness have been shared on social media as communities have sought to support each other and make sure that the most vulnerable in our society are being cared for.

God is calling us to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts. In a time of turmoil and uncertainty, let it be the love of God which people see when they look at the church. We have an incredible opportunity while we are unable to be the church gathered in our building; we are instead the church scattered in our communities and in our homes. We can no longer depend on the building to be our means for outreach, we need to share the love of God in and from our homes reflecting Him in all we say and do. A friend of mine shared this on Facebook the other day...

I would like it if when my earthly life is through I will be remembered for being a person who hopes and hopes some more. I want to be someone who hopes for others when they are struggling to do so. Our character is shaped and tested when we are most under pressure.

In the strength of God, let's choose to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and forgiveness and watch as our households, and the world, change.

Wherever you are this Mothering Sunday, whether you're on your own or celebrating with family, whether this is a day that you really enjoy or really struggle with, whether you are grieving or rejoicing, please know that God is with you and that we're praying for you.

Thank you God that you love each one of us.

Thank you for homes and help those who don't feel safe today.

Thank you God for all the people who work to take care of us every day.

Keep us close to your love each day.

Amen.