

## SERMON FOR THE SUNDAY CANTATE (Cape Town - 2 May 2010)

Text: <sup>12</sup> Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup> And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. <sup>15</sup> Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup> 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 (Col.3:12-17).

Sometimes I enjoy that people that I meet do not immediately realise that I am pastor. We can chat about Rugby, politics, or the economy of our country. And it is often only much later, that they may ask: "By the way, what is your profession, Dieter?". I tell them: "I am a pastor of a church", which usually surprises them. I am not quite sure why, but one of the reasons, I believe, is that I do not always *dress* like a pastor: Black shirt, white collar, or any other clerical garment.

But here at church it is quite different. At the latest the moment I come out of the vestry everybody, even those who haven't met me before, know: He is the pastor! They know it because I have put on my pastors robe! The same is true for a "bride". At a wedding everybody knows who the bride is. She is wearing this elegant white dress and is more radiant than anybody else.

In fact, the dress we wear even determines how we behave. I noticed a remarkable change, for example, in my son after the long Christmas holidays earlier this year. Most of the time when he wasn't playing with his friends, he was on mix-it or sloughing in front of the TV. But when I bought him his high school blazer and tie and he fitted them on, I could just see how his attitude changed. He was a proud school boy again.

This is the *metaphor* that Paul uses in our sermon text. He talks about the way that we Christians are to "dress" ourselves. He starts off by highlighting into what God has made us. Maybe in everyday life you haven't got a very esteemed position: You never became a head prefect, or the CEO of a company. But God says: (In Baptism) I have made you "holy" and you are "dearly loved" (cf v.12a).

So, Paul addresses "God's people" and says: Nobody in this world is as "pure" and "special" to God as you are to him *in Christ Jesus*. And then he draws a few dress-related consequence. He says: "**Therefore.... clothe yourself...(in a certain way) "**

Clothing is quite big thing for most of us in the early morning. You open your

wardrobe, you flick through your many dresses and you decide: "This is what I am going to wear today". You fit it on. Look at yourself in the mirror. The men might straighten their jackets. The ladies may add some make-up. And then you are ready to present yourself to the world.

As chosen and loved people of God, how are we to dress? Paul says: **"Cloth yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience"** (v.12b). Those are the ropes, if you like, we put on as we start every day.

I get up in the morning and I put on "compassion" and "kindness". Both words highlight concern and empathy "for others". When you walk into the office, you don't expect everybody else to greet you: "How are you Sir? How are you madam". But "you" are the one that shows interest and kindness in *their* lives: "How are you?"

About a month ago I watched the movie *Invectus* based on Nelson Mandela and the first Rugby World Cup we won in 1995. What struck me the most in that movie was, when Nelson Mandela invited Francious Pienaar, the "Springbok" Rugby captain - and remember, the Springbok was a symbol of apartheid for many South Africans -, to his office for tea. And when Francious nervously entered the office of this international icon, Nelson Mandela greeted this twenty something old boy him with open arms and said: "Francious, I am so honoured to meet you. How are you, son? Is your family well?" It was quite touching!

That leads us to the other attribute we are to put on, "humility". Look at our society today, how in general people jockey for the top positions often with little respect for one another or for the people they are to serve. God's people are different. I get up in the morning and I put on the robe of "humility". Humility highlights even more the concern for *others*.

If we look at these and the other attributes Paul mentions, we soon make a discovery. The discovery is: These attributes are a portrait of *Jesus*. That is the way He was (and is). When children were brought to him, he welcomed them (despite the resistance of his disciples). When the blind man in Jericho cried out: "Son of David, have mercy on me"!, he stopped and healed him. When people abused him, he forgave them.

In fact, scrutiny of Scriptures show: The Lord is always busy with *us*, concerned about *us*, interested in *us* - and seemingly totally unconcerned with himself. It is a road where a "big heart" is needed. And it brought a lot of suffering to Jesus. That is why one of the attributes that he displayed (and which we are to put on as well) is "patience" or literally long-suffering. People can abuse me, I have long-suffering. I don't loose my patience. And if I battle with this, I need to remind myself: I am "in him" (in Christ), and that is the way "he" is "with me" everyday of my life.

Fact is, this robe of ours, in contrast to Jesus', *does* get rather dirty. In fact there are days, when it gets quite filthy: No patience, no concern with others, only busy with myself. But this passage is not about "perfection", it rather reminds us *to whom* we belong. And the one to whom we belong, is also the one who died for our sins.

So at the end of every day, and even in between, I can take this dirtied robe of sin to Jesus. His blood, if you like, is the detergent (the washing powder) with which my dirty robe is washed every day. Everyday I discover filth within me. But praise to God I get the cleaned robe of Jesus everyday and hear the encouraging words: Just be what you are *in me*.

Understandably, you may respond: "I am battling. I need to be energised from within". Well, that is what the rest of the passage address.

Paul says: "***Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom***" (v.16). In this verse and the one preceding, Paul speaks about the "gathering" of God's people.

In verse 15 he speaks about the "Peace of Christ" ruling in our hearts as members of "one body". These words remind us of Holy Communion. "***Because there is one loaf (that Christ broke), we who are many are one body***" (1 Cor.10:17). Here is one source where Jesus gives himself to you. "I am in you and you are in me" - that is what happens in Communion.

The other source of Christ-energy we get through the Word. Through his Word we are connected. And that is how "He" works "his" attributes in our lives. And by the way, there is no other way. Try it on your own if you like: I am going to be patient now! I am going to be more compassionate now! Forget it! It doesn't work. These attributes grow on you through Christ's Word.

A keyword is the word "dwell". "***Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly***". "Occasional" visits hardly do the trick. It is like washing my stained garments once a month - they don't last. "Dwell" means - and that is the encouragement of Paul: Let the gathering of God's people, listening to his words, sharing Communion, be your *home*. Let that be the main, the primary source of your energy. That way and only that way you remain "connected" to Him.

We are celebrating "Cantate" (Sing!) today. I haven't even touched on this topic. But that is the *crescendo* of our sermon text. The gathering of God's people, dwelling in his word, leads to thankfulness, which in turn is invariably expressed in song. People that have Christ in their hearts, sing.

Now I know, we are not all equally gifted in singing. But who cares. It is not about the

quality, but what I express. Some of you may identify with the 3 year old boy who cam back from Sunday school singing: "Lord I love you .. And lift up my noise" (instead of my voice)". But who cares about the noise. Question is: Do you have a song in your heart?

And by the way, singing is not *only* a "response" to God's word, it is part of it. We sing *psalms* to one another. We sing *Scripture verses* to one another. This way we uplift each other. It is another way of caring for one another.

Song is something wonderful. Martin Luther professed: "Where the sound of (Christian) music resonates, the devil flees". That is why we as a family sing in our house. It is very cranky sometimes, I must confess. But do you know what? It unites. And it lifts our spirit. And as we sing, hearts that weren't grateful, often become grateful.

And that is where Paul concludes this passage: ***"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"*** (v.17).

When you look at the news and read the newspapers, it at times gets you down. But the exact opposite is true when you let the "Word of Christ" dwell in you. There is so much love. There is so much forgiveness. As you read it, "peace" enters your life. And with the peace comes gratitude.

That is God's gift to you. It is not a command: "Be thankful all the time". It is a gift that comes out of the fellowship with Christ, a heart full of gratitude no matter what you are dealing with in life.

In conclusion: Let the Word of Christ dwell richly among you. And everyday when you get up, put on your Christ-robe: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. And if anybody wrongs you, forgive him as Christ forgives you. Amen.

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