

**Preacher:** Ruth Preston Schilk

**Date:** Jan. 24, 2010

**Scriptures:** Col. 3:12-17, 2 Kings 2:1-14

**Sermon:** *Live the Brand – Wear Christ™*

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If we were to make a list of all of the sayings or stories that employ **clothing** as a means of making a point or passing on wisdom, we'd likely be surprised at their number and variety. Here are a few from our cultural folk-lore.

- Clothes make the man.
- A wolf in sheep's clothing.
- Walk a mile in someone else's moccasins.
- The shoe is on the other foot.
- Something old, something new; something borrowed, something blue.
- The emperor's new clothes/ the emperor has no clothes on!
- You can dress him/her up, but you can't take them anywhere.
- Dressed to kill.
- Dress for success.
- A man of the cloth.
- He was defrocked.
- He/she wears many different hats.
- He (or she) wears the pants in that family.
- Pull up your socks!
- Tighten our belts.

Perhaps these remind you of *other* proverbs or fables from different countries or traditions that use ordinary items like clothes to teach, warn, encourage, or spoof.

The apostle Paul, known to be methodical and logical in his writing (after all, he was a lawyer), shows his creative side in his letter to the Colossians. When Paul uses *clothing* metaphors to help us understand the way of Christ for our lives, he plugs into a long tradition

of teaching using every-day objects and habits to help his students (in this case, the church) understand. His words about clothing –or actually, clothing *oneself*– paint picture-concepts that appeal to our mind’s eye and our body’s memory.

While perhaps less primal than **smells** or **music** that can trigger memories or that make something memorable – **clothes**, and *how* we wear them, *where* we got them, and the *occasion* on which they were worn – are also part of what becomes associated with certain people, events, and life lessons:

--I remember what I was wearing when I was pregnant with Tannis and my water broke and realized that life as I knew it would never be the same.

--I remember that I chose to wear what I *did* (bright as it was) to my grandma’s funeral-- because *she* would have liked my outfit.

--I remember how contented and secure I felt as a three year-old in my two-piece yellow pyjamas with the built-in feet.

--I remember after purchasing a lovely but outrageously expensive swimsuit, being surprised by my aunt’s supportive comment that, while there *wasn’t* much fabric to show for the cost, if a swimsuit is the **only** thing you’re wearing, it’s understandable that you want to look good in it.

The apostle Paul uses the metaphor of being clothed or putting-on because there is an **occasion** to be marked, and not only marked, but ***lived***. Elsewhere in his letters, Paul says that “if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation.” It is the occasion of being **in Christ**, of having Christ live in oneself, that warrants a new wardrobe, a donning of that which declares:

–life in Christ will never be the same;

–this is what Jesus would have liked and *is* like;

–these duds are comfortable *and* a comfort to others;

–you look good and others will take notice.

Such a wardrobe never fades, never goes out of style, and never

wears out. As disciples of Christ, who we **are** determines how we ‘get dressed’ so to speak, and how we’re ‘dressed’ tells others who we are as Christians.

The prophet Elijah clothed the shoulders of Elisha with his own mantle to show that Elisha was his chosen successor. In that culture, it would not have been enough to have passed along the honour and responsibility merely by means of a formal speech or with a handshake. What was *unexplained*, yet spoke volumes, was that Elisha was given what was probably a very distinctive piece of clothing belonging to the prophet. Everyone would have recognized it and realized that the role of the person who had once worn it, had been transferred. But not only had the **role** been transferred, so had the previous owner’s character and power, since clothing that had been worn on a person’s body was considered to be filled with that person’s personality and power.

In 1 Kings, chapter 19, Elisha becomes Elijah’s disciple as soon as the mantle was thrown over him. In 2 Kings, chapter 2, it seems that Elijah at least for one last time, was wearing his own mantle again, for Elisha picks up the mantel that had fallen when Elijah ascended into heaven in a whirlwind. When Elisha stood on the bank of the Jordan and struck the water with it, the water parted, just as it had for his master. For the onlookers and the readers of this scripture, that was convincing evidence that indeed the role – and the power– of the prophet now belonged to Elisha.

The apostle Paul would have grown up knowing this important story in Hebrew history. Perhaps that was in the back of his mind as he wrote of being clothed for the role as **Christ’s** people.

Paul also knew that receiving the attributes and power of the crucified and risen Jesus didn’t require an actual piece of his clothing (old, new, borrowed, *or* blue). Paul says, “as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, *clothe yourselves*. In other words, these virtues of

compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience already belong to us, because we belong to Christ. We're reminded that they're all ready to wear. They shouldn't lie tucked away in a drawer or languish in the back of a closet.

Someone once told me when our kids were young, that she was reading a book on how to instill good virtues into your children. I was stunned. I thought, "Isn't it obvious? Read the Bible and love the Lord, and model his life!" In other words, "live the brand; wear Christ."

I don't think I'm imagining this, but I'm sure that there was, once upon a time, a brand of jeans called "Jesus Jeans." As we go through the character traits of Jesus that Paul names in Colossians 3:12, perhaps you may want to imagine putting these on like actual articles of clothing. Whether you visualize jeans or evening wear is up to you, but remember, you'll need to be picturing an **entire congregation** fitting into the outfit, for as Patty Friesen, a Mennonite Chaplain in Rosthern, SK writes:

"These qualities [compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience] are all distinctly relational, and are part of Christian community. They also describe Jesus, the Messiah, who incarnated God. It is not that Christians wear these qualities to be like Christ, but that their living **together** "in Christ" will be characterized by these qualities" [Patty Friesen, *reclaiming Jesus*, (Winnipeg: Mennonite Church Canada, 2009), p. 8].

**Compassion** or mercy was a **new** social dynamic in Paul's time, one which **Christianity** brought into the world. Our Sunday School classes in the past 3 weeks have highlighted stories of relating to others with mercy because of faith and trust in our compassionate Saviour.

**Kindness** "describes graciousness, courtesy, responsive listening, goodness, empathy, respect for the other's feelings, and generosity. Kindness describes God's gentle, caring ways [Friesen, p. 8].

**Humility** is having an appropriate view of our own limitations [Chris Marshall at Mennonite World Conference, July 2009]. “Jesus claimed humility, praised it in children, and expected it from his followers” [Friesen, p. 8].

**Meekness** (or gentleness) “is often associated with weakness. But it is not even remotely related. It describes Jesus himself who blessed the gentle. Christian meekness is produced by submission to God and results in behaviour that is in harmony with God’s ways” [Friesen, p. 9].

**Patience** is also “grounded in the character of our triune God. God proclaimed his patience (in Exodus 34:6) as being “slow to anger.” Paul experienced the patience of Jesus Christ in his pilgrimage into Christian faith (1 Tim. 1:16) [Friesen, p. 9]. I once prayed that God would give me more patience. I soon learned that learning to have patience was a lot like riding a bicycle. How do you learn to ride a bicycle? By riding a bicycle. How did I (and *do* I still) learn patience? By practising it. In families – and congregations – we have lots of occasions to practise patience, don’t we.

Sometimes the elastic on our compassion gets a little stretched. Once in a while our humility pops a button. Occasionally our patience wears a little thin. Kindness and meekness from time to time lie forgotten and rumpled on the floor.

But let’s not become discouraged. When the wind of the Holy Spirit blows and we wonder why we feel a little chilly, it’s then we realize we aren’t fully dressed. That is when it’s time to go to each other, encouraging ourselves to keep on living into Christ, continuing to help each other ‘get dressed’ by clothing ourselves in Him --to the glory of God, for the sake of the world.

**Let us pray:**

Loving God,  
By your Holy Spirit, help us grow

in compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience  
as individuals, and as a church community.

May these qualities characterize our home life, our congregational life,  
and our engagement with the people we meet in our daily lives,  
so that the name of Jesus will be known  
and his kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. Amen