**Colossians 3:12-17 December 26, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Epistle lesson, Colossians chapter 3 here re-reading these words, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This Sunday, just a day after Christmas, is a blessing in that it helps with a problem that comes up around Christmas. There are 35 hymns in the hymnal in front of you that are classified as “Christmas” hymns. While other churches have lessons and carols services, or Christmas Eve, and Candlelight, and Christmas Day services, that is not my luxury as your pastor picking hymns. I have one Christmas Eve service and 35 hymns. Now we don’t only sing 3 or 4 hymns on Christmas Eve we fit as many in as we can, but we can’t sing all 35 hymns, and the issue becomes that there are so many songs that we just have to sing that it’s hard to pick everyone’s favorites. It’s not Christmas unless we sing, “Silent Night, Joy to the World, O Come All Ye Faithful, Angels we have Heard on High, Hark the Herald Angels sing” but if I were to stop there your mind probably jumps to some other Christmas hymn or carol. That list goes on and on and on. What about “Away in a Manger?” or “What Child is This?” If you look at the hymns that were chosen today it’s the next ones on the list that I imagine to be the favorite Christmas hymns, here on the First Sunday after Christmas, or really what we could say is the first Sunday of Christmas. Christmas is a continuing season of 12 days ending with Epiphany, so in many ways the party keeps going and it’s easier to stay in the party spirit since it’s only 1 day after Christmas! But if I failed you, and I know for some I did, if I didn’t pick that one Christmas hymn that you love and that you yearn to sing every year, I apologize and ask that you hear the words of Colossians 3 which frame our entire lives dealing with each other as a family of faith. For, as Paul writes, “if one has a complaint against another, forgive them, as the Lord has forgiven you, so also you must forgive.”

There are many parts of our Epistle lesson that talk about Christmas. What greater gift can you have then to be God’s chosen one? To remember your Baptism is in itself a gift from God because you were given this gift out of mercy and you were sanctified and washed clean by God without any added effort. But to go beyond that, you aren’t just chosen you are made holy and beloved by God. It’s the feeling of being loved. Love is the defining aspect of our lives and if we love others as God loves us, the world would be such a wonderful and happy Christmas like place 365 days of the year. These are the gifts we are called to give each other, more than just one day of the year, and these are gifts that can’t be wrapped up and put under a tree. Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. It’s very similar to the fruits of the Spirit, as a matter of fact some are the same, “The Fruits of the Spirit are Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self Control.” These are the lasting gifts and the gifts that bind us together, better than material items or gift cards. We are called to give these gifts regularly in the way we deal with each other, this is our calling, this is what the sanctified life looks like.

It’s like the peace of a family gathering after Christmas, the kids all have new toys, the adults have eaten a great meal, for a moment everything seems to be alright. Even in the midst of the most horrible war in the history of the world at that time in World War I there was a ceasefire on Christmas. And then, the next day, bullets flew. People died. The next day after Christmas it’s business as normal, same fights, same problems, same lack of compassion for anyone’s problems but our own, same rudeness as we go to the store to return the stuff we didn’t want, the care and time that went into getting you this special gift and you return it for money or store credit without a second thought. Humility thrown out the window, I want what I want. Meekness gone, we are brash and unapologetic about getting our way. Patience nearly non-existent the other days of the year outside of Christmas, we want it now, why aren’t all the stores open, why haven’t we gotten back into a regular routine? Why are these decorations still up? Christmas is over, let’s move on with our lives.

These are the gifts that we truly give to the world around us, and the last thing we focus on is forgiveness, this seems the hardest gift to give. Why is it so hard for us to forgive? Paul calls for two gifts to be given to our neighbor, not just those we like or those we feel deserve it. Forgiveness and love. A love that binds everything together in perfect harmony, so love in the sense of sacrifice and care for someone other than yourself. Forgiveness is the greatest sign of love because you are sacrificing your own bitterness and justified anger for that person. You are setting aside the justice they deserve for what they have done wrong against you and forgiving them, forgetting about what happened and treating them the same as if they didn’t do it. And we struggle with this my dear friends in Christ, we struggle so mightily with this, especially with those who are closest to us. Forgiveness is to let go of the anger, the last thing you do after Christmas is keep all of the discarded and ripped up paper right? The last thing you do is keep the pieces of plastic and cardboard that a gift came in? Why would you keep these meaningless items? You keep the gift, that’s the important thing. Well why in our own foolishness do we hold on to grudges and anger for those who are truly sorry and seeking forgiveness? Now we aren’t just holding on to something that is meaningless like wrapping paper and garbage, we are holding on to something that harms us in the process. Like purposely agitating a wound, making it hurt, not letting it heal, only inflicting pain upon yourself, keeping the thing that is hurting you. Why? Why do we suffer in this way? Stubborn sinful pride. Our sinful nature getting the upper hand. Satan himself whispering lies into our ears that they don’t deserve forgiveness when we ourselves have been forgiven all of our sin by God who has done nothing wrong! Our forgiveness pales in comparison to that of God’s because we make mistakes all the time! And we need forgiveness, and yet we won’t forgive others. Shame on us all. Even on Christmas we must be called out for this behavior because it is damaging to the love that we are called to show others and it ruins the harmony that comes from being God’s chosen and holy and beloved ones.

We forgive because we’ve been forgiven. We love because He loves us. Those are God’s gifts to you, and from those gifts come all of the other wonderful things, the compassion, the kindness, the humility, the meekness and patience. Your life is a gift of God because of what he’s done for you. He’s called you, chosen you, washed you of sin, forgiven you, redeemed you, made you righteous and loved you enough to die for you and rise for you to give you eternal life. Those are His gifts for you, that’s what He’s given you. To stand in the way of those gifts or reject those gifts or to not take those gifts and share them with your fellow sinful neighbor is to spit in the face of God’s generosity, it’s to throw the present to the side and pout and cross your arms like a petulant child. So we repent, and are forgiven, and we then take that forgiveness to others so there is harmony amongst us, a peace that only God can give.

I can’t pick all the perfect hymns for Christmas, and to be honest there are so many great hymns that we don’t sing, even on Christmas. But that word harmony stuck out to me when I thought about our lives together and how it relates to music. Paul speaks about the love that we show to others and how it binds everything together, and then just a few verses later he says these words. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” What we do is because of what God has done for us, so when we sing we do it out of thankfulness to God. But the word dwelling in us, changes the way we treat others, because the Word guides us in how we teach and admonish each other. The Word guides us. As we talked about just a few nights ago, hymns are more than just meaningless words that talk about meaningless things, they are significant and timeless, and we are called to sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs together, because not only does it bring out a harmony of music, and if you are signing in harmony God’s blessings to you and please continue to do so if you are so musically inclined, but it also brings out a harmony of our fellowship together. Music is an outward expression of the love that binds us together because it speaks of the Word of God and what He has done for us and how we give thanks to Him for these gifts. I don’t care if you don’t know how to sing well, or in harmony, make a joyful noise to the Lord together with us, your family, your fellow chosen ones, out of thanks to God, not just on Christmas but all year long. God’s gifts are yours, forgiveness and love, and from them comes harmony as we forgive and love each other.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.