

Faith United Church of Christ
December 30, 2012
Message
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One of the Scripture readings from today's lectionary comes from Colossians 3:12-17:

"As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him".

Good Morning. Tomorrow we celebrate New Years Eve. As we celebrate a New Year, it is a time to reflect on the year that is ending and a time to look forward into the year that is soon to begin.

It is also a time to reflect on our relationship with God. A time where we can examine ourselves and see where we have been, where we are and where God wants us to be.

Many people make resolutions for the New Year such as things like losing weight, eating healthy, or spending more time with family and friends, but in Paul's letter to the Colossians he talks about clothing ourselves with virtues that help us to live as a loving community that advances God's kingdom in the world.

2012 has been a year for many of us filled with happiness, new jobs, new relationships, new babies, new homes, new beginnings but it has also been a year of sadness and fear: a death of a loved one, changes in our health, changes in a relationship, loss of a job, kids moving out of the house, friends moving away and for my family and the community of Chardon a day we will never forget... the fear and sadness of Feb 27th, and the shooting at Chardon high school. And just a few weeks ago December 14, again, another tragedy: the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings. These are days that we never expected and we hope to never see again but through the sadness of those days we saw what I believe Paul was trying to teach us in Col 3:12-17.

These senseless shootings have made me pause and ask the question: "What is this all about and how do we begin to heal? How can we help one another?" I began to think about Paul's letter to the Colossians. In Paul's letter you will see an emphasis on the "before and after." The author is writing to the Gentiles, "people who once lived in sinful idolatry". He writes to them, telling them that "once they had lived outside God's grace, but now they are children of God".

To begin to heal and help one another in a time of when we ask: "What is this all about?", I want to focus on one of Paul's virtues he speaks about and that is Compassion.

Compassion

The original meaning of the word compassion means to "bear another's pain, to suffer with another in his distress, to feel a responsibility toward another. It cannot be expressed outwardly unless it is felt inwardly".

When Jesus showed compassion, He did not merely offer a kind word or a warm hand. He identified Himself with the pain, the suffering, the heartaches and the hopes of others.

Thich Nhat Hanh states that , "Compassion is a verb." "Those who are without compassion cannot see what is seen with the eyes of compassion."

Compassion has long been associated with the Christian church. It was the church that first started looking after the orphans, the widows, the old, the sick, the hungry, the poor, the imprisoned and the outcasts: and the church continues to do so today.

I saw so much compassion from all over the world to the Chardon community and from this church in the response to the shootings at Chardon and I have seen the same compassion toward Newtown Connecticut. I see the same compassion in this church that moves us as a congregation to be a [Bread for the World](#) Congregation. Thank you to Pat, Ron, Rick and all of you who have written letters and given donations to help others in need. To show compassion and speak out for justice for others and to take a stand with other congregations. Please read the mission statement of bread for the world that is printed on the back of your bulletins.

We watched videos and were led by compassion to give and speak out on others behalves. Here we are again, speaking out and offering for those who feel the need to write letters in regards for Gun Control Measures: Come to the Parlor after Worship and write a letter to Congress and/or to President Obama in regards to our compassion toward those who are hurt by senseless crimes with guns.

I see so much Compassion in things like the Christmas Giving tree to help Providence house, The Ingathering: donations to hunger center, helping to serve Thanksgiving dinner to the Cleveland Clinic and to Christmas Carol to our shut ins and again to the bone marrow transplant unit at the Cleveland Clinic. I see the compassion from the Prayer Square Quilt ministry and all of us who tie knots in prayer for others.

I experienced the compassion from those people who reached out to Chardon HS, by giving the kids blankets made by Project Linus and the Extra Miles Ministry K9 Chaplains Comfort Dogs, with their therapy dogs. Hardy and Linda Alberda who were at the school day in and day out showing love, compassion and kindness to all the students involved, and we are seeing it again in Connecticut. These dogs are on their way to Newtown as we speak.

The Compassion that is pouring out from around the world. Such as The 26 Acts of Kindness in which NBC News Correspondent Ann Curry sent out a message on Twitter and Facebook. The idea, which invites everyone to carry out acts of kindness for anyone, anywhere, has evolved into a viral effort known as ["26 Acts of Kindness"](#), in honor of the students and faculty who died at Sandy Hook Elementary.

And what holds all this together, says Paul is Love: agape, sacrificial love, love that suppresses one's own desires and aspirations in favor of the needs and desires of another.

Paul didn't write this letter to tell the Colossians to make their New Year resolutions. They knew what they had to do. They knew what being a Christian entailed. They knew what was needed as they spread the good news about Jesus. And so do we. Paul doesn't tell us to make resolutions. He tells us to get with it, to live lives that demonstrate Christ-like attitudes.

This morning I am not asking us to make New Year's resolutions, I am asking for us to take action. Action to show Love and Compassion to all. If you want to live a life clothed in the virtues of Christ you need to Act. Don't wait for the new year. Begin today. Show Kindness, Compassion and Love to one another. With doing so we will have Peace!

My prayer for 2013 is to see us moving closer to being a church that acts with compassion and love to all the world. This is the life we're called to live, the life that leads to peace with our neighbors and with God.

Amen