

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

THE WORSHIP OF GOD • NOVEMBER 8, 2020

“WEAR IT!”

**The Scripture
Colossians 3:1-8**

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life.

But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth.

**The Message
Wear It: What Not to Wear
Mark Briley**



Sermon writing during an election season amidst a pandemic offers some unique challenges. For example, you're watching this sermon on Sunday morning (*or are you?*) Presumably, you're watching this on Sunday morning, and yet I'm preaching this message from the past as if it is the present. You following? This means, in real time, I'm preaching to an empty sanctuary on Thursday morning, November 5, just 48 hours after standing in line for 80 minutes to cast my vote in the 2020 election last Tuesday.

Do you see the quandary? At the time of filming, there was much still in flux in terms of who won the presidential election (*and it very likely is still in flux now*)... but now was then and then was *not* now, and Wednesday night is the preacher's new Saturday night and... I'm not sure I could even tell you my own name right now. I awoke on Wednesday morning to the same news you did. A friend had posted on social media



this picture with the caption that read, “*Here’s what we know so far....*” What we know is panic and chaos and division. Maybe we have some restructuring to do when we can’t seem to make sense of all the pictures we are seeing. Do you know who you are in the midst of today’s reality?

A beloved woman had suffered a stroke a number of years ago. On top of the cruel physical limitations caused by the stroke, the woman was also

robbed of what she treasured most – her memories. The doctor met with her family and shared how the brain attempts to knit itself back together, recreating pathways that had been disrupted by the stroke. The doc suggested the family hang pictures all around her room to help her brain reconnect with her memories. They did. Every day she would stare at the pictures with different levels of familiarity. One by one, she began to remember, making sense of what she was seeing. “*That’s my husband,*” she’d say. “*That’s my daughter.*” “*Hey... that’s our dog!*” It took some time but eventually, she had recognized every single picture except one. That one was a photograph of herself. Sometimes, when turmoil and challenge surround us, the hardest thing to recognize is ourselves. You get head-faked by yourself. “*Wait. What? That’s me? Who am I?*” As someone else put it: “*I’m more confused than a chameleon in a bag of Skittles.*”¹

We have a vision of how things are supposed to be – our lives, our church, our jobs, our families, our schools, our friends, our city, our nation... even our Jesus. People struggle with different pictures of Jesus, too. We want him to be a certain way, stand for certain things (*mostly the things we stand for*) and look a certain way. Dr. Fred Craddock was among some religious scholars invited to an early showing of a local artist’s portrait of Jesus. The artist had created the work for a church in a small Oklahoma town. Craddock said, “*At first, I was absolutely shocked. The colors were very dark, purples and blacks and grays. The figure of Jesus had a strange and very homely, ugly, misshapen face.*” On a little easel next to the painting the artist had placed what was a justification for the painting, a quotation from the prophecy of Isaiah

¹ This woman’s story is told in Bob Goff’s “*Dream Big.*” Chapter 4. Nelson Books. 2020.

53: *“He had no beauty or comeliness that any should desire him, he was one from whom people turned their faces. A man of sorrow acquainted with grief.”*

The church in Oklahoma was scandalized. The painting ended up shuffling around for a while until it was eventually destroyed or disappeared.² We want a cleaned-up Jesus portrait, a heavily filtered selfie from just the right angle, and a nation that is unified and framed in a Norman Rockwell museum. And yet here we are... uncertain of the day, the time, the cause, the hope, or the Savior.

Life is hard. It's thick. It hurts. We strive and run the hamster wheel and wonder why we're not making it. As my buddy wisely put it: *“Just because you're doing more doesn't mean you're getting more done.”* This is not how we find ourselves. We find ourselves, and each other... and the very face of Christ... when we walk in the thick spaces of life... just like we are right now.

I sat with a woman this week who has been completely blind for seven years. She was born a premature twin of only two lbs. and eventually, after decades of overcoming the lack of development in the womb, the retinas as she tells it, *“finally gave up the ghost.”* But she has as much vision as anyone you'll meet. Of this season, she said with unwavering trust, *“We're in a dark birth canal right now. I'm in the dark a lot,”* she laughed, *“but I can see it ... I can feel it... something is happening right now and 2021 is going to be as transformational as 2020 was a debacle.”*

This is a word for people of faith today. It is the good, hard work of being alive right now. Let's show up for that. Let's not waste any more time waiting for an easier time to come; let's find out who we are now and entrust our lives to the transformation to come. We can't control the Electoral College, but we can control our response to the world.

The Apostle Paul shares some wisdom about what that response might look like. Last week, as we launched this sermon series entitled, *“Wear it!”* I asked you to consider wearing grace to the polls this week. I loved hearing from a number of you who told me you were, in fact, putting on grace for the polls. This week, Paul offers something equally important: *“What NOT to wear.”*

We're sticking with Paul as he lets us look over his shoulder as he texts his friends at First Christian Church, Colossae... or Turkey as we call that land today. He starts with that curious line, *“Since you've been raised with Christ...”* Since you've been raised? Kelly Clarkson sang, *“Since you've been gone...”* but Paul sings, *“Since you've been raised...”* What does that even mean? It's a passage that many a pastor have read on baptism Sunday... and many a young person have left that baptism service with a wet towel around their neck wondering, *“Since I've been raised? What now? Is anyone*

² Story as told in “The Cherry Log Sermons” by Fred B. Craddock. Chapter 18. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2001

gonna know I've been raised? Should I dress a little nicer than before? Throw in a Scripture verse into normal conversation? At ball practice, are my teammates going to look and say, "My, my... she must have been raised this weekend. How will they know? How will I know?"

Those early Colossians weren't so sure either. They were getting into practices like fortune telling and a practice they called, "*Walking in the middle of the air.*" Would have loved to be part of that service, wouldn't you? They had taken on significant moral and ethical religious rigor. It's about this time, learning of all these things, that Paul is texting the chair of the First Christian Board. "*Stop it, would you not?*" which auto corrected to "*Drop it like it's hot.*"

Some things never change. Paul says, "*I'm sure people are fascinated by all of your flair, your smoke and mirrors and religious judgment, but that's not what it means to be raised. You're simply doing your own thing and calling it "being really religious."*

Friends, what are we doing these days that's simply our own thing that we're calling "*being really religious*"? Is it taking part in the separation ploy that we're living in right now? There is much at stake for and with our country right now, but us writing off everyone who doesn't land in the same self-proclaimed position of enlightenment that we have is not going to make for any growth in any of us. It is exhausting, for sure, but if we can't be a place to civilly consider who we are called to be, we cannot claim to be part of the solution. We can't fix what we don't understand. And some... maybe even much... of what we're living through right now is sick and not in the Spirit of what Christ brought to the world. But we can't write each other off.

When the moral elites of Jesus day wrote those same messages to their peers saying, "*We can't stay connected if this is your deal...*" how did Jesus respond to those religious folks? "*Who needs a doctor if not the sick?*" If we are not willing to listen and find some common heart together, then our contribution to the world will be the very thing we seem to despise – that we, like partisan politics, can't work together. If the church is accused of the same... if our neighbors accuse us of the same... if we're not willing to try... then who's ever going to know that we've been raised? And if we've been raised only for our own sake, why does it even matter?

Paul says, "*Got to take it off.*" And just what exactly are we NOT to wear, Paul? "*Those things of the old, unfocused, selfish life. Greed? Take off the greed. Anger? Looks terrible on you. Time to let it go. Sexual misconduct? Cast it off. Malicious talk against other people? So 2020...out of style; take it off. Gossip? Pitch it. Vulgarity? Unzip it throw it away. That's all the old stuff. Pile it all up... Marie Condo the heck out of all that stuff and let it go.*" None of that fits well or looks good on those who have been raised. And I don't know, friends... remember I hardly remember what day it is... but I do know this: figuring out what it means to "*be raised*" is a lifelong quest.

While Paul was giving wardrobe suggestions like a top-tier stylist, he was also the first to say, *“Not that I’ve got it all figured out myself.”* But as I had the recent privilege of hearing our own Demarko Coleman so prophetically lean into Paul’s follow up to that humble line: *“But I press... I press... I press...”* I will forever hear that in your voice, my brother.

I lean into the quest in a wardrobe of humility. What can happen to us is that we forget that humility is always in season. When we’ve grown through a season of faith into a new understanding... into Christ’s truth in a wholly-broadened fashion... our tendency can be to spew on those who haven’t had that same growing, expansive season.

Perhaps we despise or hold them accountable for what we’ve come to despise about what we used to wear in that old life. And it’s not a before and after Christ thing as our before thing was often at least a sheep in wolves clothing. It was a brand of faith... a religion not made in the image of Christ, but a Christ portrayed in the image of a religion that looked more like us. But when did you grow? And how? When did you take off the anger and pious spirit and put on something more in the fashion of Christ’s love?

What if you may be the very one designed and uniquely equipped to love another to life as someone did for you? We’re all wired differently, but I know I’ve grown the most not when chastised for my limited understanding or narrow view but rather when loved, understood, and invited to wade into God’s great expanse with another who valued me as I was before I could value who God knew I could yet become.

Has someone done that for you? Could you do that for another? Could we be the kind of church that not only welcomes all but a church that also offers that space for growing discovery of what it looks like to be tailor-fitted themselves into the expansive mystery of Christ? We’re good at saying, *“You’re welcome here.”* Can we be just as good at refraining from, *“Now do it, think it, wear it just like me... just like us.”* Oh, it could be beautiful... and, friends, it may be the only hope for a divided nation who has said, *“I’m so done with you.”* Could we press... could we press forward – not in aggression but with gracious resolve not to live with a real-life-Hunger-Games spirit toward one another? This is not a new challenge we face. Jesus walked it and lived through such turmoil with his peers. Why else would he teach, *“Love your enemies”*?

What could you redeem? What spirit could you uplift as you move through your world that would cause anyone, but maybe especially your enemies to think, *“They must have been raised...”*

We’re ready to drop each other, I know. As I was writing this word, Taylor Swift was playing in the background singing, *“We are never, ever, ever getting back together.”* You may feel that way with some of your former friends, church mates, neighbors, family, whomever right now that’s not in your political camp. But I can’t help but hear

the voice of Martin Luther King Jr. who was simply offering a brief re-tell of the Good Samaritan story of a so-called enemy helping another out of the gutter. Do you remember how it goes? King says it like this: “*The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: ‘If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?’ But the Good Samaritan reversed the question: ‘If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?’*”

Now... this was a very physical story about a man with very physical needs and such is quite important. But it can be a broader tale, too. You can picture in your heart right now, someone or a group of someone’s... maybe someone’s wearing particular political stripes ... and you’re looking at him or her or them as the enemy. And you’re tired of it... *but*... when you take off anger and malice and evil desire... can you see a person God loves? Can you wonder what might happen to him or her or them if you throw up your hands and walk on by? And... can you imagine your growth... and perhaps theirs... if you reach out anyway? What would that say about *you*? About *me*? What would it say about *us*? Does loving your enemies keep them enemies... or do we believe love transforms? Love redeems? Love overcomes?

For all I know, by now... the “*Here’s what we know so far...*” map still looks like a crayon-scribbled mess. I am certain all the states have not magically turned the color of your preference as tight and tidy and uniformed as that might be. But Paul says, “*That uniform is not all it’s cracked up to be.*” Instead... lay down the negative and put on something positive. Instead of fighting with rhetoric that further divides, volunteer your time to help a child in need or write cards to encourage people you know are hurting right now, or put on kindness and do something generous for another. Would that go farther for your own spiritual walk... and perhaps theirs... than blowing off steam via another rant of trying to convince that one remaining high-school classmate that friended you not knowing you’ve had a new thought in the last 30 years? I don’t know.

It’s harder to volunteer. That’s true. It’s harder to go the extra mile for an enemy. No doubt. Can’t say I’ve always made that choice myself. But... it’s all a choice. You get up, you think about what the day could be, and you decide what such a day will require you to wear... and what *NOT* to wear. Choose well. Choose grace. It doesn’t have to match everyone else’s... it just needs to coordinate with Christ.

May it be so.

Song of Response
“Your Grace Lived Out in Me”
Words and Music by Ed Varnum

1. You gave me life, a new creation.
Please help me live in your new way.
I struggle, fall into temptation.
Transform my very heart, I pray.

Refrain:

I rid myself of anger, malice,
revenge and hatred, hostility.
Cleanse from my lips insults and slander,
with just your grace lived out in me.

2. Lord, shape my life and guide my actions.
Help me to think before I say
the words that hurt, create division,
Lord, rid me of these things, I pray.

Refrain:

I rid myself of anger, malice,
revenge and hatred, hostility.
Cleanse from my lips insults and slander,
with just your grace lived out in me.

3. Surrendering to your gracious Spirit,
I cleanse myself in life renewed
of every hurtful word and habit,
a life of joy and peace in you.

Refrain:

I rid myself of anger, malice,
revenge and hatred, hostility.
Cleanse from my lips insults and slander,
with just your grace lived out in me.

The Benediction

As we move from this sacred time, let us put on the armor of God:
the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness,
the sandals that bring the gospel of peace,
the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit,
wearing the strength of God, we go in peace.