

**Davidson College Presbyterian Church**  
**Davidson, North Carolina**  
**Mary Margaret Porter**  
**“Minding your Ps and Qs”**  
**Isaiah 62: 10-12, Colossians 3: 12-17**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent**  
**March 6, 2016**

When I first read this passage of scripture in preparation for today’s message I was reminded of the oft used parental directive for children to ‘mind their Ps and Qs.’ When I began to think about this adage though I had no idea what it actually meant – I mean Ps probably meant ‘please’ but what are Qs? For answers I went to the fount of all knowledge – Wikipedia. Here is what it said.

“There are several different theories as to the origin of the phrase, but there is no definite proof as to which is correct.

One explanation suggests that "Ps and Qs" is short for "pleases" and "thank-yous", the latter of which contains a sound similar to the pronunciation of the name of the letter "Q". This phrase is used by parents to educate their children to not forget to use those polite words when they speak to people. Possibly, it meant, "please" and "excuse me." Young children would pronounce them as Ps and Qs.

Another origin comes from English pubs and taverns of the 17th century. Bartenders would keep a watch on the alcohol consumption of the patrons; keeping an eye on the pints and quarts that were consumed. As a reminder to the patrons, the bartender would recommend they "mind their Ps and Qs" and settle down.

I’ll leave it to you to decide which one you think is correct.

But the more I thought about this phrase, the more it spoke to me about this text. We again find Paul writing to one of the churches, this time on Colossae to urge them to remain faithful and not follow pagan or other leaders who would attempt to pull them away from the faith in/of Jesus Christ.

He explains, as Robert reminded us last week, that Christ has reconciled all things to Himself through His death on the cross and resurrection to new life, setting us on the path to right living. Here Paul explains that right path –what it looks like and how to follow it.

In Chapter 3, where we find ourselves this morning, Paul argues that the Colossians, and we, need to set our minds on things above rather than those of the earth. Because we have been raised with Christ into new life we are a new creation and this requires a new way of being.

Paul uses the analogy of clothing to describe how we should live in response to Christ. In Romans 13:14 Paul commands all Christians to “clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ....” Here in Colossians, he describes how we may accomplish this.

This is done by "putting off" the ways of the old life. Colossians 3:5-11 contains two lists of five negative habits Christians are to shun – to take off, including, anger, wrath, malice, slander, and deceit – these are the things of the earth. These are things we shed as part of our new identity in Christ. As new creations in Christ these things now no longer fit us – what was once comfortable and familiar has become coarse and strange – we must shed these old and worn out items.

As recipients of this gift of grace and forgiveness in Jesus Christ we are called, rather, to clothe ourselves with qualities that are Christ-like - to drape ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience and forgiveness. As God's chosen people we are to put on these qualities that reflect the character of God. God has been compassionate and kind toward us sending his only Son to reconcile us to God. God, in Christ has shown us humility and meekness. God has shown us patience with us and has forgiven our sins.

Paul then goes on to explain how all these clothes, these attributes of Christ, are bound together by love. Love is what holds it all together – the love that God showed in Christ, Christ showed to humanity and the Holy Spirit continues to foster in our own hearts – this becomes the belt that secures it all in place. And like the old adage “the clothes make the man,” our being clothed in Christ should be reflected in the way we interact with one another and in community. Just as people see the physical clothing of shirts and pants - so they should see our spiritual clothing in the characteristics and behaviors in our daily lives. One important note on these clothing characteristics – the “you’s” throughout this passage are plural, which makes sense, given Paul’s words about the body of Christ in verse 11. “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.” We are in this together, since Christ is in all. So, although we must put on these attitudes and display this behavior in our personal lives, we need each other to recognize and exercise them. And not all of our ‘outfits’ will look the same – for some compassion will be a flowing wool coat while patience may be a mere-t-shirt, while for others Patience is the big puffer coat where meekness as a little lacking. You see we need one another – each given different gifts – to model the fullness of the attributes of Christ – to show us where we are lacking and to ‘teach and admonish one another’ as Paul notes in keeping these articles as full as possible.

You see - following Christ – being as Christ - is a personal matter, but never a private matter. In today’s individualistic age, Paul’s insistence on the corporate is a needed reminder. We can’t do this alone. We must do it in our life together.

But I believe this is easier said than done – sometimes these new clothes feel like an itchy sweater you can’t take off, a down jacket on a 90 degree day, or your favorite jeans that, after a few years, are now two sizes too small but you have to wear it because everything else is dirty and you haven’t done the laundry – not that I know anything about that personally.

Sometimes these Christ-like attributes feel so uncomfortable we insert a layer in-between them and our skin to get some distance from them. You know these items – the insincerity t-shirt that has ‘bless her heart’ written on it – or the silk shirt that you know is just a smidge more luxurious and expensive than your neighbors – because you checked to be sure. Or the turtleneck that hides the redness in our neck and face – the result of our anger at our spouse, children, co-worker or anyone who makes life seemingly more difficult for us.

These are the layers that are harder to rid ourselves of. They are comfortable – familiar. They are the ones we knew from before. How do we rid ourselves of these old – worn out undershirts?

Three times in this passage Paul gives us a clue when he mentions the importance of gratitude. First, he says simply, “Be thankful.” Next, he says, “With gratitude in your hearts, sing songs to God.” Finally, he says, “Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God.” Such an emphasis on gratitude highlights its importance.

Developing a grateful heart makes life happier, keeps the bad times in perspective, relieves the pressures of life and celebrates the fact that each day is a precious gift.

Meister Eckhart, wrote: “If the only prayer you say in your life is ‘Thank you,’ that will be enough.” Christians are to be characterized by an outlook of gratitude about everything because we know that we do not deserve anything. Everything comes to us as a gift of God's love and grace. We learn from the Scriptures that we are a fallen people. We are self-centered, and opposed to others – we prefer our own way to God’s way. God, in perfect justice, could have wiped out this entire race and none of us would have hope for anything in this life or beyond. But God gave it to us anyway, John tells us for “God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son. (John 3:16)” What a gift! And everything else comes with it.

Christians are to have a sense of gratitude for everything – everything - because it is all undeserved. So be thankful, says the apostle. Let thankfulness characterize our lives and the rest will follow.

And this gratitude can affect others and us in ways big and small. I recently read a story by a young woman that struck me by the way gratitude can shape our lives in ways we may not expect.

The woman writes, "On the way back from work every evening, more often than not there would be a homeless man standing at the exit of the freeway. He looked to be in his late 40's but was probably a lot younger.

His eyes were what struck me the most about him, they were brown and they had a sparkle. Like an inside light that was beaming out of his eyes. People say they can tell a lot from a person's eyes. It was certainly true in his case. He always waved at every car, he was always happy and smiling and sometimes almost dancing.

Every day after work I would remember to gather any spare change, and put it aside to give to him if I saw him. A feeling of joy would come over me every time I saw him, as I came off the ramp. He had that effect.

I'd quickly roll down my window and give him the coins. Occasionally the red light would be on for a minute and we would ask each other about our day. His answer would always be the same, "I'm blessed!".

I knew what his answer was going to be every time, yet I would still ask. It amazed me that even in his situation of being homeless he was so positive, and his answer would remind me of how blessed I was. A single mother of four amazing kids, with a place to call home and with a job to provide for my children.

Then one day I was called into my boss's office and was told that I was being laid off due to the economy. A feeling of worry engulfed me, and for the rest of that day all I could think of was "how am I going to provide for my kids, how am I going to pay rent, what am I going to do?"

Needless to say that on my way home that day I was very sad and upset. I didn't remember to look for my spare change and keep it ready like I usually did. I wasn't feeling the joy as I got off the ramp where the homeless man would be. Yet there he was as always, as I turned the ramp. He set his eyes on me, while still smiling and waving at others.

I'd hoped to catch the green light, but I missed it. While I was waiting for the red light to turn, he strolled over to my car. He had a big smile he looked me straight in the eyes. He seemed to know something was off and he said, "Today - I will give you a dollar". He then reached into his pocket and pulled out a dollar bill. I was blown away. I burst into tears. I wanted to jump out of my car and hug him!

You see that day he gave me more than a dollar bill, he taught me a valuable lesson. No matter what material things are taken from you, no one can take away your choice to be thankful and joyful - to be generous in spirit. My ride home was smooth sailing, I had lost my job, had no savings, but I knew I was blessed!<sup>1</sup>

You see, no matter who we are or the situation we are in, when gratitude becomes the layer we put on first - beneath all others - this sense of thankfulness naturally prompts us to love others and ourselves, to be empathetic and to find meaning in serving others, to become more generous and to care about justice - to recognize those that don't have as much - not necessarily money or wealth - but love, compassion, friendship, whatever - and share what we have with them. True gratitude for God's act of

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.kindspring.org/story/view.php?sid=19544#sthash.ROglqTS2.dpuf>

love and forgiveness in Jesus leads us to those things that are of above – true gratitude leads us naturally to practice compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and above all - love.

Paul says “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.”

How do we do this – how do we put on gratitude first??

A man by the name of Frank Fried had an excellent piece of advice. He said,

“Folks, the grass is not greener on that side of the fence.

And the grass is not greener on this side of the fence.

The grass is greener where you water it.”

The way to grow a thankful heart is to turn into a garden of thanksgiving. In short... you and I need to practice thankfulness.

So maybe we ALL need to remember to ‘Mind our Ps and Qs.’ But this time we may think about this phrase differently – you may think of a cold beer – but I hope you also think about **P**racticing thank **Q**s – still say please of course – but if we remind our selves to practice thankfulness. If we all were Mindful to Practice saying Thank you – to one another – to our families – to God – to remember that everything is a gift – even our very lives - then imagine the finery we all may be dressed in?