

**Davidson College Presbyterian Church**  
**Colossians 3: 12-17**  
**Year C. 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Christmas**  
**Christ is born. What difference does it make for us?**  
**December 30, 2018**  
**Larry Lyon**

So what is it that we **feel** like proclaiming right now, this first Sunday after Christmas, this last Sunday of 2018?

Is it something like this?

Go tell it on the mountain: I have a new computer, or a new Iphone, or a new Ipad.

Or, go tell it on the mountain: I have a new voice personal assistant, and it does more of what I tell it to do than either my spouse or my children, or in my case, my grandchildren, who are beginning to figure out that they, too, don't have to do what I tell them to do. Except in my grandchildren's case, I try not to tell them what to do, but only "encourage" them to do something.

Or, go tell it on the mountain: the people I voted for in November take office in January, and January begins on Tuesday.

Or, go tell it on the mountain: the chaos of Christmas is over, and I can resume my normal life, finally.

Are those things, or things such as that, are they the **good** news?

Or is it something more, something like:

Go tell it on the mountain: Jesus Christ is born.

(pause)

**Jesus Christ** is born.

Does that make a difference in who we are and what we are and how we are?

Jesus Christ is born. He came to us, in the flesh, a living Christ, in the form of humanity. He lived among us. He taught us. He preached to us. He showed us. Sometimes we don't even have to listen to what he said; we only have to watch what he did, how he treated other human beings, what the priorities in his life were.

Immanuel. God with us.

So the question becomes? Does any of that make a difference, for you, for me, this very day, Dec. 30, 2018. We call ourselves his disciples. We call ourselves Christians? Can anybody out there, on Main Street, tell?

(pause)

If we truly love Christ, we need to reveal and to reflect Christ to the world.

How do we do that? How **can** we do that?

Well, we can pretty much start with these six verses from Colossians. These verses are in a sense a recipe for Christian living. It is "Living as A Jesus Disciple 101". We make it more than complicated than it needs to be. We debate meaningless things more than we ever need to do. We say, Christ is our Lord and our Savior, and that is terrific. That's great.

But now let others see that in ourselves. Clothe ourselves. Not clothe ourselves in the right words, the right slogans, the right social media postings that tell everybody how much we love Jesus but clothe ourselves.....with **compassion**..... and **kindness**..... and **humility**..... and **meekness**.....and **patience**. **Forgive** one another, as the Lord has forgiven you, Colossians says, so you also **must** forgive. I will come back to that one. Love one another, because love is from God. Be thankful. Study God's word, sing to God your praise and thanksgiving, and whatever you do, whatever you do, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, verse 17.

Somebody once described the late George H.W. Bush as a compassionate conservative. His son, George W. Bush, then labeled himself a compassionate conservative when he ran for president in 2000. I don't know why, but perhaps somebody thought that all conservatives are not compassionate, so in the

Bushes' case, somebody felt it necessary, or at least helpful, to say they were not only conservative, but compassionate conservatives.

Well, let me say this:

Nobody ought to feel the need to put "compassionate" in front of the word Christian. We shouldn't have to tell anybody we are "compassionate Christians." It ought to be **redundant**.

A Christian *should* be compassionate. A Christian *by definition* should be kind, a Christian *by definition* should be humble, a Christian *by definition* should even be meek, a Christian *by definition* should be patient, a Christian *by definition* should be thankful, a Christian *by definition* should be forgiving, and lest we forget, a Christian *by definition* should be loving.

That is who we are.....and what we are.....and how we are. And why? Because Jesus Christ is born, unto us, a Savior.

pause)

I have been blessed.

I have been blessed not only by God, but by the people God has placed in my life.

This has been going on, like forever. Many of those people I encountered for the first time in a church: people like Mr. Rupp and Charlie Maxwell and Mary Cook Koontz and Fran Allison and Pete Chase and here at DCPC, I could name lots more, but I will name only one, a woman recently honored by the Presbytery of Charlotte for her remarkable goodness: Sharon Sells.

I have spent a lifetime as part of a church family. I still believe in church. I still go to church. I'd still go even if I ever left the ordained ministry and wasn't paid for showing up at church. Our experience of church has been positive.

Oh, I have heard from many people their bad experiences of church, the ones who have told me, oh yeah, I used to go to church. **Used to**. But it kind turned me off eventually, they say. I've also had relatives, close relatives, leave church. They just walk away, shaking their heads. They went to church expecting one thing, and what they found was quite different. So they left.

I have a theory about all of this.

If people feel loved in a church, they do not leave.

If people come to church, and in that church find a community that welcomes them, that cares about them, that learns their name, that is kind to them, that accepts them for who are they are, that does not demand that they conform to the way they are, that loves them, they do not leave.

They stay. They come once, and they come again.

I have been beyond blessed by a number of church communities that are like that, beginning in childhood. I don't think my mother made me go to church. I **wanted** to go to church, not in small part because that community cared about me as a child and as a teen-ager.

Communities that care, that nurture, that love. Communities full of people who are, kind, humble, patient, compassionate, forgiving, and loving. People who are not perfect, by any means, but who at least seek to emulate Jesus Christ to another human being.

I think people in this world are looking for something like that, more than ever. It is a harsh world, a divided world, honestly, a rude and even angry world. And so people hunger for something more, a different model than they experience say in the road rage of others, like every day on the highways and byways of Lake Norman. They say people look for a "third home," a place to go and to be, beyond their own homes, beyond their own workplaces or schools. Coffee houses have cashed in on just that, even bars and breweries. Places where people can go, and sit, and talk, and be themselves. People seek community. People need community.

In the body of Christ, they ought to be able to find community.

They ought to be able to find kindness. They ought to experience mercy, and to discover grace. They should feel loved. They also should know forgiveness. Every Sunday we confess our sins, yes, but every Sunday, we also hear the declaration of forgiveness. It may be the single most important thing that happens in worship, and I hope you hear it, actually hear it, every Sunday.

Forgiveness. Oh my. Even some I have known to do love well, and to be gracious, and merciful, and faithful, and hopeful people, even they sometimes stumble over forgiveness. They cannot forgive. They do

not want to forgive, they have no interest in forgiving, because they may have been done so wrong, they almost feel that if by forgiving, they would be condoning, or forgetting.

And so here is a story of forgiveness, of a Christ-like moment in American history.

**(in two services a video played here. In the 11 a.m. service, I said something like this:**

Peter Miller was a pastor who changed from being a Presbyterian to what was called a “Baptist Monastic.” His change in theology so upset an older man, Michael Widman, that it incurred Widman’s wrath. Widman cursed Miller, spat on Miller, even physically abused Miller, who was 70 years old at the time. Widman went onto to become a traitor to the American cause during the Revolutionary War as well, and he was convicted of treason and sentenced to die. And yet Peter Miller pleaded Widman’s case, asking General George Washington to forgive Widman and stop his execution. Washington at first said no, telling Miller he could not pardon his “friend.” Miller said, “he is not my friend, he is my enemy.” So moved by Miller’s remarkable mercy, Washington stopped the execution. Widman and Miller became friends.

Tony Campolo is the man seen in the video talking about Peter Miller. He is a preacher, an American Baptist preacher, who is considered a red-letter Christian, someone who takes the sayings of Jesus as a priority in their lives. I don’t know. A part of me thinks “red-letter Christians” should be redundant. We do follow Jesus for more reasons than our own salvation, correct?

So we love, because God loves us. We forgive, because God forgives us. We are grateful. And in whatever we do, we shall seek to reflect Christ Jesus to a hurting and angry world.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, go tell it on the mountain. Jesus Christ is born. May it make a difference, in who we are, and in how we choose to live, and to love.  
Amen.