

Colossians 3:12-17

Fruitfulness on the Frontline - Modelling Godly character

Last week Dawn started this new sermon series called Fruitfulness on the Frontline.

Its a series looking at how we can be fruitful, effective Christians in our day to day lives - wherever we find ourselves on a Monday through to Saturday.

And throughout the series we'll be using various passages in the letter to the Colossians.

The Christians who received this letter lived in an ordinary town, living in many ways ordinary lives.

Last week Dawn reminded us who it is that that is with us in our day to day.

That this Jesus is the agent of creation.

He is Lord.

He is enough, no matter what situations we are facing.

Over the next few months we'll be looking at 6M's that will help us be fruitful on the frontline.

This morning we are looking at the first one of those - Modelling Godly Character.

God's people are to put on a new set of characteristics that are appropriate to belonging to Christ.

The primary context of this letter is that it is for the Christian community.

But as v17 says, 'whatever you do...'

And later on in Ch 4of this letter Paul says:

“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt...”

So we can apply this to our day to day lives.
Who we meet on a Monday through to Friday.

Now the emphasis is on ‘modelling Godly character’...

Its the way we come across to others.
Its how our character leads people to expect certain kinds of response from us.

<Talk about the football with the Baptist church..!>

Its not that we shouldn't have been competitive.
Its not just about trying to be nice, cheesy Christians.

But for me, there were just some characteristics lacking..

Like gentleness, patience, generosity..

Our character's are often shown at there most clearly when we come under pressure.

Whether that is in the midst of a battle on a football field.
Whether our grumpy boss is making unreasonable demands on us.

Whether our friends or work colleagues start to gossip/slander an absent friend or acquaintance, and there is an expectation that you join in.

I find it relatively easy to be patient when nothing is trying my patience.
Or I find it easy to be joyful when life is good.

But its at those testing times, those times when we are under pressure that our character becomes more evident.

Character is what people remember.
 Godly character will affect those around us.
 It will leave a lasting impression for good.

Godly character will point people to the source, the One who we worship, the One who gives life.

If you look at some of the people of the New testament..
 We don't know whether Thomas was dour, or Epaphroditus funny, or Elizabeth shy.
 We do know that Thomas was courageous, Epaphroditus persevering and Elizabeth upright.

Its character that the NT writers were concerned about.

OK, in our reading, Paul says:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,

Paul says 'clothe yourselves'...

And there are two principles that we can take from this passage when we think about what it means to clothe ourselves...

The first is this:

1. The Lord equips us to model Godly character
 So it is something he does in and through us.

2. Practice living the characteristics of Christ

There is responsibility on our side.

Lets look at this first principle:

That the Lord will equip us to live these characteristics....

When you read a list like this it will either inspire you or depress you.

You'll read clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience etc

And you'll think great, lets do it...

Or you'll think, for goodness sake, how can I possibly do all that?

And the truth is, in our own strength it is unlikely whether we will be able to muster up the kind of compassion, kindness, humility etc that Paul mentions here.

We have to remember that we are new creations in Christ.

Earlier in Colossians Ch3 Paul says:

you have taken off your old self with its practices, and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator.

Modelling Godly character is letting the life of Christ flow in and through us.

It is knowing the foundations on which we stand.

Paul says here:

as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves

These are foundational truths that if choose to live in the reality of them, they will allow the Spirit of God to flow in and through our lives.

They are truths that we mention often here at St. Mary's.

But it is good to be reminded of them each week if necessary.

That we are chosen people...

He wants us in other words.

He has approved us, qualified us, we belong to Him.

We are holy...

Simply means set apart.

We are special to Him, he has commissioned us to represent Him on earth.

We are dearly loved...

Unconditionally, not because of what we have done or do, but because He has chosen us and redeemed us.

Elsewhere it says there is nothing that can separate us from His love.

Not even death...

Verse 13 says "*Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*"

It is knowing all our sins are forgiven, wiped out.

If we are to model Godly character, our motivation, our pattern, our inspiration has to come from our relationship with Christ.

Verse 15 says: Let the Peace **of** Christ rule in your hearts.

As we experience His peace in our hearts, we are more able to fulfil our calling to exhibit His peace to those around us.

Paul says:

Let the word **of** Christ dwell in you richly... as you teach and admonish...

Our life and our relationships are to be marked by Christ and motivated by Christ.

Otherwise its just hard to...

*clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness
patience, forgiveness, love, peace, thankfulness, wisdom....*

Its hard...

Particularly when you experience times of testing or pressure...

<Talk about Holiday club at the Top school!>

When we fail, it just shows that we all works in progress.
Which we all are...

But when we have our foundation firmly set.
The more we allow His Spirit to flow in and through our lives.
The more obedient we are to the promptings of His Spirit.

The more our characters will be Godly...
The more our characters will reflect who Christ is more accurately.
Particularly at those pressure times...

So the Lord equips us to model Godly character.

The other principle is this:

1. Practice living the characteristics of Christ

Yes the Lord equips us.

But equally, we are in a partnership with Him.

Paul has just said there are things we should take off that were associated with our previous life.

Before we became new creations...

He has said put to death... sexual immortality, impurity, lust, evil desires etc...

We'll cover that passage in more detail on another week.

Now Paul says clothe yourselves...

There is an intentionality about clothing ourselves.

<This may not be a surprise to you, but it takes me about 1 minutes to get dressed in the morning.

That shirt will do...

Usually the jumper that is on top of the pile gets selected.

Then I'm downstairs...

I'll just say it takes Louise a little bit longer...

She often wakes up planning what she will wear.

Making sure things match well.

Making sure clothing matches with bracelets and other bits and pieces.

I'll just say it takes a bit longer...

I do concede though she looks amazing and better turned out than me!

Both of us though are intentional about it.

And we dress ourselves appropriately for what we are going to do that day.

If I have a funeral I won't put on blue jeans.
If its cold outside, I'll have a thicker jumper.

We dress appropriate to how we are going to act.

If I was going jogging, I would put on shorts and a sports top.
if I was going on a hike I would clothe myself in sturdy walking boots.

Because that is what will be appropriate.

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And Paul is saying that we are to clothe ourselves appropriately for being the chosen, holy, dearly loved people of God.

Because if you dress appropriately you will act appropriately.

And this list Paul gives:

compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness,
love, peace, thankfulness, wisdom

I think, are characteristics that we can intentionally practice.

Because when we do that, what we are doing is setting our stall out.
We are turning our face to be obedient to the one who has called us.

We are aligning our wills with His.
We are cooperating with Him.

So practice these things.

When your boss makes unreasonable demands on you.
Practise perseverance and patience.

When your friends at the gym wrongly criticise someone.
Stay silent, don't join in.

When someone cuts you up on the road, practice generosity.

Practice kindness, practice thankfulness...

And it will get noticed.

That quiet perseverance, patience in the office will have an affect.

It will make a lasting impression.

Godly character isn't just about being nice...

Hovering through life with some serene, angelic grin on our faces.

Our model is Jesus.

He wasn't always nice as we sometimes understand nice.

He's the one who calmly makes himself a whip to throw the money changers out of the temple.

The one who calls the Pharisees a brood of vipers and whitewashed tombs.

The one who deliberately antagonises his own home town by making a messianic claim.

The one who shook the establishment by eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners.

The one who let a prostitute wash his road-dirtied feet with her glorious hair.

The one who rebukes his dinner host for not treating him properly.

Jesus courageously set his face to go to Jerusalem knowing what awaited him.

He allowed himself to be nailed to a cross and prayed for those who nailed him there.

Jesus was not nice as we might define it.
But he was obedient to the Father's mission, and He was good.

And Godly character is not just about doing loving things.

We probably all know people who do 'loving actions' out of bitterness, insecurity, or with grumbling, resentment etc..

Godly character will often lead to loving actions... and should do.

But Godly character is about who we are.

Or more accurately, who He is being ever more intertwined with who we are.

So all aspects of our life are transformed.

To sum up...

Modelling Godly character is a cooperation.

The Lord will equip us.
Allowing His Spirit to work in and through us.

But also, we are to practice living the characteristics of Christ.
Being intentional about it.

And as we do that, those around us, those we work with, those we have coffee with, those we work out with will be drawn to the One who is good.

The One who gives life to the full.

Amen!