

Sermon: Wearing the inside out Psalm 145 Ephesians 3:14 – 21

From last Sunday, you will recall the apostle Paul's Letter to the Colossians when we talked about clothing ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and love. In his Letter to the Ephesians today, Paul is sharing his depiction of the Christian Church.

With the world, now as then, being in a muddled state, we see division everywhere, between nations, between people, even within a person's own inner life; muddled. So, Paul is focusing on our inside today because he knows how important this is. He begins this letter reminding us that we, as Christians, have been chosen in Christ; that God has chosen us for a very special mission, to continue what Jesus began, as the Body of Christ in the world. God's design from the beginning of the new covenant in Jesus Christ was to bring all the sheep of the sheepfold back into the loving arms of the Good Shepherd; that Christ's Church would again and together be the Body of Christ.

This reuniting of God's people is a challenge, at best. To attain this, we must not only reach out to those of this sheep pen, but also carry the message of Christ and the love of God to every person in our community; indeed the world. Now, when I say *the world*, I know this sounds daunting, so let's stick with a more manageable plan; the neighbours with whom we live right here in our local communities.

Let's begin with this. It was always in terms of Jesus that Paul thought of God. This why we pray *in Jesus' name*. It is through Jesus that God is accessible, approachable, with unrestricted access to, for, and with us. In our world divided, God welcomes everyone back to the safety of the sheepfold. He is the Good Shepherd, and God's fatherhood extends to everyone; through Jesus; through God's Holy Spirit; through you and me; right here in Lucknow/South Kinloss.

Paul goes on to remind us that part of what it means for us to be chosen in Christ is to be called into a community that stands united in a divided and divisive world. So, if we are going to live as God's chosen, and if we are going to stand united as Christ's Church; as the Body of Christ together; we have to be strong; wearing the inside on the outside in the power of God's Holy Spirit.

As is customary for Paul, he offers us specific, practical ways to strengthen our inner beings by using our reasoning, our conscience, and our will. Jesus wanted to strengthen the reasoning of his friends such that they were better able to distinguish right from wrong, and the wisdom to keep life safe and pure.

From here, Paul prayed that our conscience should become more sensitive; not hardened; not dulled; not disobedient; but re-sensitized in Christ. Our conscience is like a bellwether. God gives every one of us conscience to help and guide us. God's Holy Spirit speaks to us through our conscience to guide, direct, and instruct us.

God also gave us freewill; the option to choose; so Paul prayed for strength of will. We know what is right, and intend to do what is right, which takes discipline and strength. Our inner strength then comes from our reasoning, our conscience, and our will, and the secret of this strength is the presence of Christ who was born at Christmas, so what better time than the beginning of a new year to re-commit ourselves to Christ and His Body - the Church.

Now, here's the wonderful part of our calling and obligation as God's holy people and followers of Jesus. Christ makes it pretty easy for us. He will gladly come into anyone's life, but will never force His way in. Jesus waits for our invitation. He waits for us to open the door of our hearts to His life-saving grace.

Accompanying this sermon, you can see the familiar image of Jesus;

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock".

Do you see a door handle on the outside of the door? No.

Will Jesus just force the door open? No.

God has given us freewill; and like the words of poet Robert Frost; "two roads diverged"; which means we have the choice to walk along our own path, or choose to walk in God's path.

I believe in angels. I believe that God places angels and situations on our path to comfort us, to accompany us, to warn us, to guide us, and to teach us. But God will never trespass on your will. God calls out to us. That's why Jesus stands at the door of your heart and knocks. It's an invitation. That's all it is. Standing on the inside of the door is you and me. Standing on the inside of the door are people who have yet to hear about Jesus, people who; for whatever reason; have wandered away from Jesus, and people who want to open the door but just aren't sure how.

Many years ago, my brother was struggling with his faith. Just like me, he'd grown up in the church, but that's not the same as faith. Going to church is what we do. Faithful to Jesus is who we are. My brother saw my joy and the joy of others, and said, "Rob, I really want to get it. There's a part of me that wants to know Jesus, but I'm just not feeling it". I remember being at his house one day, and there on the coffee table was a book, 'The City of God', by St. Augustine. I remember saying to my brother, "You're trying too hard. Just open your heart, pray to God, and Jesus will come in". Today, my brother is a very active member of his church in Sarnia. Jesus was the One knocking at the door of his heart the whole time. All I did was help him navigate through all the muddle. And that's what you and I can do for ourselves, our families, our friends, and our neighbours, who may just need a little help navigating through the muddle of a world divided. We cannot make the choice for them, and God will not trespass on their will, but we can be the reminder that by opening the door, their lives will never be the same. They will find a peace and a purpose that they have not known before. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" is emblematic of you and me actively welcoming people back to the safety of the sheepfold.

No one is outside the love of Christ, and no place is beyond His reach. In letter after letter, Paul gives thanks to God for the communities to whom he is writing; even the letters he wrote from prison. Paul teaches us that if we want to find strength in our inner beings, then it is important to give thanks to God at all times and in all circumstances, and in his contentment, Paul goes on to say, "I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me." This can be a challenge because our world teaches the opposite. Every advertisement we see is geared to make us discontent with what we have, so, learning to be content frees up a lot of energy to do and to be what God would have us do and be.

Are you struggling with being content? Bring it to God in prayer.

Are you finding it difficult to be thankful? Bring it to God in prayer.

Pray without ever giving up, and God will help you achieve contentment, and a thankful heart.

This is why Paul concludes this passage with powerful words of praise, reminding us to wear the inside out. "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory *in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations*, forever and ever. Amen."

Paul circles back to the thought which dominates his letter to the church. Where can we find this love; this peace and purpose for our lives? We find it in the fellowship of the Church.

18th century theologian and evangelist, John Wesley, once said,

"God knows nothing of solitary religion". "No one", he said, "ever went to heaven alone".

It is in the *fellowship* of the Church; the *fellowship* with Jesus Christ in community; that we best experience the love of God, which is why Paul is sharing his depiction of the Christian Church and reminding us that we, as Christians, have been chosen in Christ, and that God has chosen us for a very special mission in 2025, to continue what Jesus began, as the Body of Christ in the world. That God's design from the beginning of the new covenant in Jesus Christ; just begun at Christmas; was to bring all the sheep of the sheepfold back into the loving arms of the Good Shepherd; that Christ's Church would again and together be the Body of Christ. It is God's design that all people should become one in Christ, and to achieve this end, Jesus needs you and me to tell people in our families and communities of His love and mercy, and we can best do that when we are joined together in worship and fellowship, experiencing for ourselves the limitless love and reach of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

To God be the glory. World without end. Amen.

I pray God's richest blessings and Christ's Peace for you and your loved ones in 2025, and look forward to seeing you in the community and at church.

Robert