

First Presbyterian Lancaster

12.30.18

“New year, new you”

Our Old Testament scripture this week is Psalm 148: listen now for the word of the Lord

1 Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord from the heavens;

praise God in the heights!

2 Praise the Lord, all God's angels;

praise the Lord, all God's host!

3 Praise God, sun and moon;

praise God, all you shining stars!

4 Praise the Lord, you highest heavens,

and you waters above the heavens!

5 Let them praise the name of the Lord,

for God commanded and they were created.

6 The Lord established them forever and ever;

God fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.

7 Praise the Lord from the earth,

you sea monsters and all deeps,

8 fire and hail, snow and frost,

stormy wind fulfilling God's command!

9 Mountains and all hills,

fruit trees and all cedars!

10 Wild animals and all cattle,

creeping things and flying birds!

11 Kings of the earth and all peoples,

princes and all rulers of the earth!

12 Young men and women alike,
old and young together!
13 Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for God's name alone is exalted;
God's glory is above earth and heaven.
14 The Lord has raised up a horn for God's people,
praise for all God's faithful,
for the people of Israel who are close to the Lord.
Praise the Lord!

Our New Testament scripture today is from Colossians 3:12-17, listen for the word of the Lord-

12 As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. 13 Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Usually, when a new year approaches, we have dreams about different resolutions that we will complete in the new year. Maybe you have a resolution to lose weight or spend time with your family more, or even save money. But this year, I would encourage you to find your resolutions in our New Testament scripture from this morning. As we enter the new year, I've thought about my own resolutions, and most

of them have to do directly with this passage. There are the parts of this passage we expect entering the new year, to love others, to do everything in the name of God, to forgive other people. But then we truly think about those aspects of our lives, are we truly interacting with people in the way this scripture calls us to? I imagine not, at least not all the time.

First and foremost, this scripture addresses us directly as “holy and beloved”, we are God’s chosen ones- therefore we are holy and beloved. I think about the number of times that I don’t treat others as holy and beloved chosen ones of God. How would our world change if we saw every single person as a holy, beloved, chosen one of God? I imagine our world would get much more compassionate, humble, kind and patient. Those are the exact qualities we have been asked to clothe ourselves in.

In the last week, there have been many moments that exemplify these gifts perfectly. For example, we just celebrated the greatest being of all time coming into this world as a humble child, we celebrated after being patient for the Prince of Peace to come. We maybe had to have a bit more kindness and compassion for the other people who were just trying to get things done in the holiday season.

For example, I’m sure all of us were very kind and patient as we spent time sitting in traffic while we drove to get that final gift. Finally, we are asked to clothe ourselves in “meekness” and I found something interesting about this word- it’s not implying that we should be weak. Instead, this word is speaking to having the strength to deny ourselves and walk in grace with other humans. It says that we are willing to not only be humble and allow others to shine, but we are excited for that shine to come from them. But this week, we were asked to be meek and to spend time letting other people have a bit more grace than we would usually give to them.

Did you catch though, that this verse isn’t only referring to Christmas time love and grace toward people? This passage isn’t just talking about the holiday season or any specific event in our Church calendar. This passage is calling us to clothe ourselves in these fruits of the Spirit every day of our lives, consistently.

The sticky part of this passage, and the part that seems most difficult sometimes, is to forgive people just as God has forgiven us. But this is required directly after the phrase “bear with one another.” The phrase implies that we must be willing to forgive even when living together and being in the community seems to wear on us. And being in a community really is exhausting. There are times that we don’t want to forgive and there are things that feel too big to forgive for.

I was watching a video on Facebook recently- a pastor, who’s a bit alternative, was speaking about forgiveness... her name is Nadia Bolz-Weber- and maybe you watched this video too- but she has this whole theory on forgiving jerks. She says, in her video, that we must forgive people not because what they have done is ok, but because what they have done is so not ok, that you don’t want to hold that in your own mind anymore. That there are times we need to set down our own anger and grudges so we can be healthy people who can continue to be productive people. I believe this is exactly what this passage is referring to. There will be some times that we feel so wronged by another person that we can’t possibly set it down and be free from that anger. However, these are the times that we must forgive each other the most. Trust me, I know this seems nearly impossible. It seems like there can’t be a solution to the problem. The text answers that question as well.

“We must forgive, as Christ forgave us.” This seems like the most simple answer in the world, but in reality, it tells us so much more. Let’s look at the way Jesus forgave us, he forgave without a cause. He fulfilled God’s plan without requiring anything in return. That is an incredible amount of Grace that we can not begin to fathom. Because of this grace, and because it has been given to us, we must give it to others. But why? Jesus seems to be the answer usually, when we have questions in Church. But this time the answer is love.

This Love is one that pulls everything else together. In commentaries of this passage love is described as a belt, that completes everything. It is the thing that creates perfection within the ties of the other fruits of the Spirit. If we are not pursuing these actions out of love, it is not truly the call Jesus gives us.

If we are doing everything through love, forgiving each other, letting other people shine brightly, if we are being humble, and patient, our next call is to be thankful that the peace of Christ is holding together our single body. We are the ones who must show this peace of Christ to others and explain why and how we have been accepted into it. This peace is given to us freely, Christ just asks that we accept it and love one another. This text speaks of being thankful for this peace. In the new year, I am sure there will be many times that don't feel peaceful, even in the last week, peace hasn't been the first thought on my mind sometimes. But this text reminds us that Christ is the peace and the love that hold us together in community with one another. We need to let ourselves be thankful that Jesus has already taken the burden of sin and hatred toward one another. We are called to be thankful for peace.

One of our final calls from this passage is this: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom;" I believe sometimes this is one of the hardest calls of all. Even harder than forgiveness and love and being thankful for peace. Because this call speaks to the need to truly know the scriptures of our Lord, and allowing Christ to truly dwell within us. Often if someone disagrees with our stance on things, we find the perfect Bible passage and use it as a sword to prove our point and win the argument.

That is not what this passage is referring to. Because when we are doing that, the wisdom behind our interpretation is not found out of love, or peace, or humility, or meekness. The wisdom there is out of pride, and the need to be right. Trust me, I know this is hard, because we can feel sure that we know the true meaning of the text. We have a better translation, and a better understanding, and a better knowledge of the text. But friends, listen as I say, every side is fighting for their side. We must not use the scripture out of hate and pride to prove our points. Instead we should form relationships with one another, truly understand each other, and then- finally- have conversations out of love about our differences. Then the Word may be used. If it's wisdom is being shown out of love and humility rather than pride and hate.

Immediately after being called to use all wisdom of the Word, we are called to sing songs of praise with all gratitude in our hearts. I admit to you, I am not the most musically connected person. It's just not the part of the service I get into the most. However, I understand that other people really connect to music and love that aspect of Worship. Even as much as I don't connect to music in my day-to-day life, I read passages like our Psalm today, and I immediately understand the importance of song. I understand why we sing to God, and why we use song to praise God. This psalm names every single thing they could think of, and tells it to praise our God. There is power in the Spirit that can connect things in that way.

So let us bring songs of praise to our God, with gratitude and love in our hearts. And finally, our last call, in everything we do, may we do it in the name of the Lord. Honoring God through Jesus and keeping in mind everything we do should be to glorify them. Everything we do day to day, we are called to glorify and give thanks to God.

As we enter this new year, and as we leave 2018 in just a short, 36 hours. Let us bear in mind this passage. Because while it was not written for a community going into a new year, it is a clear reminder of what is required of us and how we are called to interact with our neighbors. We are called to be humble and patient, to clothe ourselves in meekness, kindness, and compassion. We are called to bind all those qualities with love, as a belt around our waist. Because of that love, we must live in peace with one another, using the wisdom of scripture in love and grace, and forgiving people even when it is difficult to forgive. Even when we feel like there is nothing harder than forgiving them for their wrong doings, we must forgive. Finally, we must be thankful to Christ, and we must sing songs of praise and glorify God.

As we enter 2019, my friends, take these lessons to heart and study this scripture. Forgive the ones who have hurt you this year, and ask forgiveness from the ones you've hurt. Love every other person you meet as the beloved and holy child of God that they are.

If you would pray with me:

God,

You have called us holy and beloved. You have asked us, simply, to follow your Word and spend time in a community of love that celebrates you. We have fallen short of these calls. God, as we enter this new year of our lives, walk beside us and send your Spirit to guide us in walking closer to you.

In your most holy and awesome name,
Amen.