**August 7, 2022 Colossians 3:14-4:6**

***Walk the Walk***

**Scripture: *Colossians 3:14 - 4:6 NRSV***

*(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. (18)Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. (19)Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly. (20)Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. (21)Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart. (22)Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. (23)Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, (24)since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. (25)For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality. (4:1)Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven. (2)Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. (3)At the same time pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, (4)so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should. (5)Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. (6)Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.*

**Notes:**

1. Paul would have us ***walk*** the **walk**.
   1. The walk of a Christian says much about their ***faith***.
      1. *“(12)… 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. Colossians 3:12-13 NRSV”*
   2. To the Christian, the opposite of love can be ***arrogance***.
   3. A Christian, stands with the ***least*** and the ***lost***.
   4. Are you ***willing*** to show kindness to those in need?
2. ***Forgiveness*** is easier said than done.
   1. When wronged, our natural tendency is to get ***even***.
   2. It’s not easy to ***forgive***.
   3. Where is the ***forgiveness***.
3. Holding on to past grievances, only hurts ***ourself***.
   1. When ***wronged***, put it in God’s hands.
   2. Love is the ***foundation*** of this new life in Christ.
4. Paul’s words were ***revolutionary*** and ***startling***.
   1. ***Treat*** each other as we would like to be ***treated***.
   2. Jesus is our ***example***.
5. Your faith is best shared by what you ***do***, not what you ***say***.
   1. The way you live speaks volumes about where you place your ***confidence*** and ***trust***.
   2. The way you walk the walk, is most ***important***.
6. The world is ***watching***.
   1. We are the only ***church*** they may ever see.
   2. Walk the walk of ***Jesus***, our Lord and Savior.

**Script:**

I have a T-Shirt that reads, “Live your life so the preacher will not have to lie at your funeral.” This past week I was tasked with performing a funeral for a 26 year old young man who was tragically killed in an accident. As I performed the service, I wanted so badly to console the family and tell them that they would all see each other again in heaven, but I couldn’t, I could not tell them something that I was not positive of. To the best of my knowledge, he was a good guy, a former marine. A man who held his parents, brother, bride and friends on a pedestal; yet I had no evidence that he would be in heaven when time on this earth comes to an end. I wish that I would have known him so that I could have a better knowledge of where this young man stood with God, and where he would spend eternity. But I didn’t, so I danced around the question and statements that he would be in heaven.

So most of this week, I have been wondering, how am I living my life, will the preacher have to lie to my family and friends when they gather to mourn my passing, and celebrate my life? How about you, when the day comes, will the preacher be able to stand tall and proudly proclaim that you were among the saints and heaven has welcomed you home. Or as you think of this question, do you have doubts, are there fears that the things you do in the privacy of your life may be enough to keep you out of heaven?

These past three weeks we have been traveling through Paul’s letter to the Colossians. We have read how he commended them for keeping the faith, warned them to beware of false teachings, and encouraged them to strive for the goal of new life in Christ.

Paul ends his letter with practical instructions for living this new life in Christ. The goal is not for them to talk a good game or act all prim and proper in public; but, the goal is for them to talk the talk and walk the walk; to live in such a way that their thoughts, words and actions match their beliefs. To live in such a way that the pastor will not have to lie at your funeral, but is able to celebrate with the saints in glory that you have made it home. Stand with me as we share in the reading of our passage today from Colossians 3:14-4:6

***(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. (18)Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. (19)Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly. (20)Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. (21)Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart. (22)Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. (23)Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, (24)since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. (25)For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality. (4:1)Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven. (2)Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. (3)At the same time pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, (4)so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should. (5)Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. (6)Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone. Colossians 3:14-4:6 NRSV***

I read a story this week about a youth pastor named Keith, who took his youth group rappelling. They gathered at the top of a 75′ cliff, where an instructor named Bob took charge. Bob explained the gear and now it works, then he strapped it on Keith to demonstrate. Keith had never been rappelling. He had his doubts. He certainly didn’t want to go first. But he was the youth director, and it was up to him to lead the way.

Ever so slowly, he backed to the edge of the cliff. As he got past the point of no return, Bob said, “Hold it right there for a minute.” Keith held onto the rope at a 45 degree angle and waited for Bob to give him the go-ahead. Bob looked at the kids and said, “I understand the good reverend here talks a lot about the importance of faith.” The youth smiled and nodded. “Well, now he’s going to show you what faith is.” Keith gulped. This didn’t sound good.

Bob said, “Keith, I want you to let go of your left hand and wave to me.” Keith took a deep breath and released his grip on the line. Then Bob said, “Now, I want you to let go with your right hand.” Keith knew that if he released the rope in his right hand, he’d go sailing down the mountain. The only thing to stop him was the safety line, which Bob held around his waist. He said, “Come on, Bob, this isn’t funny!”

“You’ve got faith, don’t you?” Bob said, “Now’s your chance to prove it. Let go of the line.” Keith said a prayer and released the line. His body fell back an inch or two, as the safety line took hold. Then he held both hands high in the air and waved. The kids waved back. Bob looked at the kids and said, “Now, that’s faith. Until you’re willing to let go, it’s just talk.” With that, Keith took the line back in his right hand and rappelled safety down the mountain.

You see anyone can talk the talk, but Paul would have us walk the walk. The walk of a Christian says ten times as much about their faith as their talk does. Paul tells us in last weeks passage to “ (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. Colossians 3:12-13 NRSV”

What would you say if I asked you “What’s the opposite of love?” Most people would say hate. Love and hate are generally accepted as opposites. But, when it comes to the Christian life, the opposite of love can also be arrogance. An arrogant person is one who stands above others and keeps his distance. He’s condescending, looking down with pity, perhaps, but not compassion. He refuses to stoop to the level of those below him and risk getting dirty – or worse, being identified as one of them.

A Christian is one who stands shoulder to shoulder with the least and the lost, the down and the out; who identifies with those who are hurting and sees himself, in the words of D.T. Niles, simply as “one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.” (D. T. Niles)

The person who best epitomizes Paul’s description of “compassion, kindness, lowliness, humility, and perseverance” is Mother Teresa, walking amid the slums of Calcutta, stooping to feed a starving beggar, nurse a bleeding ulcer, hold a dying person in her arms until he takes his last breath. When I heard Lori Salierno speak several years ago, she shared that it was a lot harder to do that it sounds.

This may be a stretch for most of us, but it’s not too much to ask: Are you willing to show kindness to those in need, to look upon those less fortunate with compassion, and confess, in all humility, “but by the grace of God, go I”?

Then there’s the matter of forgiveness: “… forgiving each other … even as Christ forgave you.”

Forgiveness is easier said than done. When someone hurts you, your natural tendency is to hurt them back, to avenge the wrongdoing, to get even. It’s not easy to forgive. Humanly speaking, it’s not always possible. There are times when the hurt is so deep and the wrong so heinous that the thought of forgiveness goes beyond our wildest imagination.

This past week I saw reports that Al-Qaida leader al-Zawahri had been killed in a US drone strike. And many people cheered. This man was responsible in helping to plan the terrorist attacks on 9/11. Some went as far as to say he was the architect who designed the plan. So now, 20 years later, he is assassinated. I do not want to get into the politics of this event, but I have to wonder, where is the forgiveness, could we have forgiven this man; or, were his offenses against democracy and Christianity too great to forgive?

I have heard Alexander Pope quoted as saying that, “To err is human; to forgive, divine.” He’s right. At the end of the day, it’s God who forgives, not us. Our choice is to let God be God and deal with the everyday hurts as best we can, to follow the words of Paul to the Romans, “(17) Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. (18)If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (19)Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." Romans 12:17-19 NRSV”

Nursing old wounds and holding on to past grievances, only hurts ourself. When someone hurts your feelings or does you wrong, the best response is to cut your losses and move on. If possible, forgive and forget. If not, put it in God’s hands and let God set you free to get on with your life. Refusal to forgive allows others to continue having power over you. Paul says to “walk in love,” and to “,let the peace of God rule in your hearts … and be thankful.”

Love is the foundation of everything pertaining to this new life in Christ. John says it best, “(7)Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. (8)Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. (9)God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 1 John 4:7-9 NRSV” Whole books and commentaries and countless sermons have been devoted to the subject of love, but I want to remind you of Paul’s words to the Corinthians, … (4)Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant (5)or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; (6)it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. (7)It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (8)Love never ends. … (13)And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”

It’d be nice if we could stop here, but Paul goes on. What follows is a passage many find offensive. It sounds out of touch with the world in which we live – old school and politically incorrect. Listen anyway.

“***(18)Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. (19)Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly. (20)Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. (21)Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart. (22)Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. (23)Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, (24)since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. (25)For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality. (4:1)Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven.”***

To many this sounds sexist and outdated in our enlightened age and being. But in Paul’s world women had no rights; children were at the mercy of their father; slaves were just that property to be worked. To the Colossians, Paul’s words would’ve sounded revolutionary and startling. As far as he was concerned, husbands and wives were to relate to each other with mutual love and respect. Parents were to nurture their children and build them up, not put them down. Slaves were to obey their masters, and masters were to treat their slaves fairly, with dignity and respect. When we get away from our own agenda and begin to read what Paul is saying, we will find that he is telling us to treat each other as we would like to be treated. Paul is not speaking as a chauvinist, he is describing the New Life in Christ. In this life we are called by Christ to live:

* a life in which husbands and wives are to work together as partners in marriage, playing their separate roles, to be sure, but in so doing, complementing each other’s strengths and abilities;
* a life in which fathers and mothers are to regard their children as children of God and do everything possible to help them know their place in God’s great family of faith;
* a life in which masters and slaves, property owners and hired hands, residents and aliens are to benefit each other and so, serve the common good.

Paul spoke on good authority; listen to Jesus words. “(42)So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. (43)But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, (44)and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. (45)For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. Mark 10:42-45 NRSV” Jesus is our example. He laid down his life for the sins of the world in order that the world might be saved through him. On a personal level, he died for you in order that you might be free to live for him, serving others to the glory of his name.

Paul concludes, talking about prayer. Prayer is the staple of every Christian’s diet. It gives us immediate access to God. Nothing stands in the way. You can pour out your heart to God, 24/7, and God will be listening.

To walk in wisdom with those who are outside the faith is to relate to non-Christians with understanding and acceptance, not judging them for what they believe, or what they don’t believe; look for common ground on which to work for the common good. Let your speech be full of grace; speak the truth in love, with candor and good humor, yet always be mindful that our words have the power to heal and to hurt.

What you believe is best shared by what you do, not what you say. The way you live your life speaks volumes about your principles and values and where you place your confidence and trust. It’s easy to talk the talk; but when the rubber meets the road that is when you walk the walk.

Based on what others hear and see in you, how would they describe your relationship to Jesus Christ? What discernible difference is there about the way you live? I remember sharing this several years ago, but it is worth sharing again; if you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Paul reminds us, *“(10)For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil. 2 Corinthians 5:10 NRSV”*

So I return to my t-shirt slogan, are you living your life in such a way that the pastor will not have to lie at your funeral. Even more important have you asked the Lord for your forgiveness, have you asked him to come into your life and make the changes necessary to make you more like him, have you asked him to help you shed your old self and create in you a new life? If not today is the day, come to Jesus. He should be the Lord of your life, He should be the one you speak to first when you encounter a problem, He should be your comforter, your counselor, your best friend. He gave his life that you might be able to receive him as such, but he will not enter in where he is not invited, Invite Jesus into your life today.

We, as the church, must remember that the world is watching. They are watching the Christian community and how they react to the events of this world. For many we are the only church they may ever see. Don’t just talk the talk, walk the walk. Walk without vengeance or malice or greed. Walk with humility, walk with kindness, walk with wisdom, walk extending love to all. Walk the walk of Jesus, our Lord and Savior.