

So... what's your favorite holiday? Thanksgiving? Love the turkey- especially if I've smoked it! Easter? The empty tomb has such powerful meaning my life and I'll eat the ears off of every chocolate bunny I can find. 4th of July? I love my country and fireworks are awesome. Labor Day? I love the pause right before school starts up. However my favorite holiday is Christmas. I've always struggled with Christmas because it's also my birthday, but it really is my favorite.

I always sense a different attitude, a different spirit in our culture around Christmas. We all seem to be more fully alive at Christmas. Sure there's all the crazy shopping and people fighting for that last gift but it's almost as if we all are expected to be nicer to each other at Christmas. There are people coming to your door singing carols. Neighborhoods light up with wonderful, hopeful lights. And something happens in our neighborhood that doesn't happen any other time throughout the year – people walk across their snow covered lawns and give each other cookies or other sweet things. It seems that the baby Jesus reminds us all that we can live better with each other.

Even our text for today reminds me of what we would say to each other around Christmas time. Read Col. 3:12-17. Sounds like Christmas Eve doesn't it. Can you feel the cold wind and the snow blowing? Can you hear the carols over the crackling of the fire? Not yet? Too soon? We'll maybe, but the words that we hold so dear at Christmas are the words that are for us every day. You are chosen, not because you are better, but because God is the one choosing and God is good.

God has given you the gift of faith and is waiting with great anticipation for you to open it and use it. Kind of like Christmas when you have chosen to give someone you love a gift and you wait for them to open it, but more importantly you wait for them to use it. Because you know if they use the gift it will change them. They will become more fully alive. And that's what the Apostle Paul is saying in Colossians. You have been given this gift of faith and when you use the gift of faith it's like putting on new clothes – compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, healthy communication that leads to forgiveness and love. And when and where do you wear these clothes? Everywhere you go: all day every day.

But here is what is also true. Sometimes when I read text's like this I get swept up in the beauty and the hope of it, but just like Christmas it fades over time. I start digging in my closet and in my drawers for other clothes. I start switching up my wardrobe. Maybe some socks of anger one day. Or maybe some pants of hate, or maybe a shirt of judgement. Maybe one day I'll match my belt of shame with my shoes of guilt or color coordinate my tie of pride with my suit of selfishness.

Then I hear the words from Colossians and it's like staring into a full length mirror in a department store and I can see again, that I've got my clothes all mixed up. How does this happen? First of

all we are human beings, we are not perfect beings. Sometimes we mess up. Secondly and probably most importantly, I find that we forget who we are. We forget we are chosen. All kinds of crazy things happen to us in this life that seem to fight against the notion that we are chosen. Ever been the last one chosen for a team, or maybe not even chosen at all. I can remember my little league try outs way back in the spring of 1982. We were all lined up on the baseball field after our workout and the coaches started choosing. And guess who the last one left on the field was? Yep. Me. I didn't feel very compassionate, or kind or forgiving. The same kind of stuff happens every day, just maybe not on a baseball field at age 11. We get beaten down at work, at school, in our relationships, our health or health issues with someone we love. The world seems out of control and we feel anything but chosen and our wardrobe reflects it.

This is one of the reasons why I think worship is so important. It's a weekly reminder that we are chosen. God chooses us. We are chosen by the creator of the universe, but even better we are chosen for something. We are chosen for. And we are also reminded that we are chosen for one another. Where does all that compassion, kindness, mercy, humility, forgiveness and love end up? It ends up blessing the lives of those around us. It ends up binding us together, creating families and communities that are led not by fear but by wisdom and gratitude.

So when and where does all this compassion, kindness, mercy, humility, forgiveness and love happen? It happens where ever you are, where ever you go and with whomever you encounter. It's a way of life. We reflect being chosen in our daily lives. In church speak it's called our "vocation" or our calling. We typically understand our "vocation" or our calling to reflect our professions as in some are called to be teachers, nurses, accountants, plumbers, butchers, bankers etc... And it is true that in our professions, the things that we do for a living, do feel more satisfying to us if those things match up with our sense of calling.

However our calling as God's chosen is so much more than what we do for a living. Our calling as God's chosen is to remember that we are chosen where ever we live work and play and to respond in every circumstance with compassion, kindness, mercy, humility, forgiveness and love. You may feel highly fulfilled in life as a plumber, or butcher or nurse or banker, but that's not your true calling. Your true calling is as God's chosen. You may feel truly unfulfilled in your work life, but the gift for you is to know that your true calling is as God's chosen.

So what does that look like? Well it looks a lot like Christmas. It looks like neighbors walking across their lawns bringing cookies or a helping hand. It looks like neighbors spending the time to get to know each other so they can help and support one another. It looks like neighbors reaching out and inviting each other to be in relationship. Our world is in desperate need of God's chosen people living out their calling in the very places that we live. I invite you

to join me this week to reach out to a neighbor, someone in your building or someone on your street, remembering that you are chosen and share with them compassion, kindness, mercy, humility, forgiveness and love.

Let's take a moment as we end this time in prayer. I'd like to pull the image of that neighbor up in your mind right now. See their face, their house and let's pray for your conversation with them right now.