

**SERMON – FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH WAUWATOSA
FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS
DECEMBER 31, 2000**

**TEXT: Primary Sermon Text: Colossians 3:12-17
 Gospel: Luke 2:41-52
 Related Lessons: 1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26, Psalm 148**

**FOCUS: Qualities we as Christian people are to reflect. Put on the
 qualities of those who are given to God's service. Body of
 Christ (CHURCH FAMILY) matures as it grows in the
 character of Christ.**

PRAYER:

**Creator God, in the reading of the scripture, may your word be heard;
In the meditations of our hearts, may your word be known;
And in the faithfulness of our lives, may your word be shown. Amen.**

“ON GROWING UP”

WELL.....HERE WE ARE AGAIN!

WE MADE IT. ANOTHER HECTIC HOLIDAY SEASON

AND FOR GOOD OR FOR BAD,

LOTS OF PEOPLE ARE HAPPY TO SEE IT ALL OVER WITH.

WE'VE ALSO ARRIVED AT ANOTHER NEW YEAR.

THIS PARTICULAR NEW YEAR'S EVE

FINALLY BRINGS AN END TO ALL THE MILLENNIUM VIEWS.

THE TV AND RADIO PERSONALITIES WILL BE DONE WITH

ALL THE DEBATES ON ...

IS THIS THE OLD OR NEW

OR SECOND OR THIRD MILLENNIUM?

BUT NOW THAT CHRISTMAS IS OVER,

“T’WAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS.”

HAS BEEN SHELVED FOR ANOTHER YEAR.

THE CHILDREN’S SHEPHERD,

ANGEL AND SHEEP COSTUMES

HAVE BEEN PACKED UP AND PUT AWAY

IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL CLOSETS...

...TO AWAIT THE NEXT CHRISTMAS PAGEANT.

FOR A FLEETING MOMENT WE MIGHT ASK....

****WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

WHAT HAS IT ALL MEANT?

ON THE ONE HAND,

THERE IS A SOMEWHAT DESERVED...

“WHEW” ON OUR HEARTS

AND ON THE OTHER HAND

THERE IS A LEGITIMATE NEED TO ASK

WHERE THIS LEAVES US IN OUR SPIRITUAL LIVES.????

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF CHRISTMAS?

--THE PROMISED MESSIAH HAS BEEN BORN TO ISRAEL,

--THE GLAD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY HAVE BEEN
ANNOUNCED

--AND THE PROPHETIC WORDS OF SIMEON,
“...MY EYES HAVE SEEN YOUR SALVATION...”
HAVE BEEN SPOKEN.

HOW DOES ALL THIS TRANSLATE TO OUR LIVES?

THE FIRST CLUE COMES IN LUKE’S GOSPEL ...

JUST BEFORE OUR READING OF TODAY.

WE LOOK BACK TO THE WORDS OF LUKE 2:39-40

THEY ARE A FITTING PRELUDE

TO EVERYTHING THAT FOLLOWS

AND POINTS TO THE IMPLICATIONS

OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY FOR OUR LIVES.

“WHEN THEY HAD FINISHED EVERYTHING

REQUIRED BY THE LAW OF THE LORD.

THEY RETURNED TO GALILEE,

TO THEIR OWN TOWN OF NAZARETH.

THE CHILD GREW AND BECAME STRONG,

FILLED WITH WISDOM;

AND THE FAVOR OF GOD WAS UPON HIM.”

THE BIRTH OF JESUS WAS JUST THE BEGINNING.

HE HAD TO LEARN TO OBEY HIS PARENTS,
GROW PHYSICALLY,
EMOTIONALLY,
INTELLECTUALLY
AND SPIRITUALLY.
HE NEEDED TO MATURE.

THE BIRTH HAS NO MEANING
UNLESS HE GROWS
AND MATURES
AND BECOMES EVERYTHING
THE PROMISES OF GOD SAY HE WILL BE.
THE POSITION OF CHRISTMAS IN OUR CALENDAR YEAR
COMING JUST ONE WEEK
BEFORE THE NEW YEAR
SUGGESTS SOMEHOW,
EVEN IF UNCONSCIOUSLY,
THAT CHRISTMAS IS THE END OF SOMETHING.
WE “GET BACK TO NORMAL,”
AFTER THE HOLIDAY SEASON.
BUT JUST AS THE BIRTH OF JESUS
WAS THE BEGINNING OF SOMETHING,

SO ALSO IS THE CELEBRATION
OF ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS
FOR WE AS CHRISTIANS ... IT IS THE BEGINNING OF SOMETHING!
JUST AS JESUS GREW AND BECAME STRONG,
FILLED WITH WISDOM
AND ENJOYED GOD'S FAVOR
SO WE ARE CALLED TO GROW IN SPIRITUAL WISDOM
AND IN FAVOR WITH GOD.

JESUS GREW TO BECOME A TRANSFORMER.
TO BE AROUND HIM WAS TO BE TRANSFORMED.
HE WAS A TRANSFORMING FORCE.

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY – THE CHURCH—
IS TO BE FOR CHRIST....

THE TRANSFORMING COMMUNITY IN THIS WORLD.
IF WE ARE NOT A TRANSFORMING FORCE
IN THE CORNER OF THE WORLD WE INHABIT,
WE MISS THE WHOLE POINT OF ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS.
THE ANCIENT MESSAGE,

“JOY TO THE WORLD, THE LORD HAS COME.”
IS TO BE LIVED OUT IN THE CHURCH,

BOTH IN OUR LIFE TOGETHER
AND IN OUR RELATIONSHIP
WITH THOSE PEOPLE,
WE ARE ABOUT TO DISCOVER
THAT IS THE WHOLE POINT OF CHRISTMAS!!!!!!!
WE ARE CALLED
TO BEAR THE CHARACTER
AND QUALITY OF CHRIST
IN OUR LIFE TOGETHER.
WHEN JESUS GREW IN WISDOM,
STATURE
AND IN FAVOR WITH GOD,
HE BECAME A MODEL OF EVERYTHING
GOD DESIGNED YOU AND ME TO BE.
---- A PATTERN FOR THE CHURCH
TO EMBRACE AND GROW INTO.
WE ARE TO GROW INTO
OR MATURE IN THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST.
THAT PATTERN IS SPELLED OUT
IN A CLEAR WAY IN OUR EPISTLE READING FROM COLOSSIANS

---AS PAUL TALKS ABOUT

THE CHARACTERISTICS WE AS INDIVIDUALS

ARE TO DEVELOP

AND THEN ABOUT THE PATTERN

FOR OUR LIFE TOGETHER AS THE BODY OF CHRIST.

FIRST OF ALL ...

LET'S LOOK AT THE CHARACTERISTICS WE ARE TO DEVELOP.

HAVING COME TO KNOW THE LOVE OF GOD,

WE ARE TO *CLOTHE* OURSELVES

WITH PARTICULAR QUALITIES.

THE TERM“*CLOTHE*”.... IS THE SAME TERM

WE WOULD USE WHEN WE TALK ABOUT

GETTING DRESSED FOR THE DAY.

SO, YOU ARE TO “*PUT ON*” THESE CHARACTERISTICS.

***AS CHRIST, WE ARE TO BE COMPASSIONATE AND KIND.

COMPASSION GOES BEYOND SYMPATHY.

SYMPATHY IS A GOOD QUALITY,

COMPASSION MEANS WE ACTUALLY ENTER INTO

OR PARTICIPATE IN ...

THE OTHER PERSON'S SORROW,

MISFORTUNE OR DIFFICULTY.

KINDNESS DENOTES BOTH ATTITUDE AND ACTION.

IT IS THE HEART THAT REACHES OUT

TO MEET THE NEEDS OF OTHERS.

THE QUALITY OF HUMILITY CAN BEST BE EXPRESSED

AS HAVING A REALISTIC ASSESSMENT

OF WHO I REALLY AM IN THE EYES OF GOD.

IT DOES NOT MEAN A NEGATIVE VIEW OF MYSELF

OR TO BE VOID OF SELF ESTEEM .

IN THE BEST SENSE.....HUMILITY RECOGNIZES MY LIMITATIONS,

BUT WITH A STRONG RELIANCE ON THE POWER

AND GREATNESS OF GOD.

MEEKNESS HAS TO DO WITH UNWAVERING TRUST IN GOD

EVEN IN THE FACE OF DIFFICULTY

AND FINALLY.....PATIENCE

RECOGNIZES THAT GOD WILL FINALLY BE VICTORIOUS

AND NOW, WE HAVE MADE THE FULL CIRCLE

AND THE LOVE OF GOD WILL PREVAIL IN THE END.

NOW LET'S LOOK AT THE PATTERN

THE BODY OF CHRIST IS TO FOLLOW.

THERE ARE FOUR CLEAR PRINCIPLES HERE

WHICH THE CHURCH IS CALLED TO INTEGRATE

INTO ITS LIFESTYLE.

a. “BEAR WITH ONE ANOTHER”

THERE IS A SENSE OF GRACIOUSLY LOOKING BACK IN TIME

TO OUR CHRISTIAN ANCESTORS.

LEARNING FROM THEIR DISSAPOINTMENTS,

THEIR MISTAKES,

AND STRUGGLES OF LIFE

AND LOOKING AHEAD

TOWARD OTHER CHRISTIAN PEOPLE

WHO WILL TOUCH OUR LIVES IN MOMENTS OF

DISAPPOINTMENT, MISTAKE AND STRUGGLE.

IF THERE IS A REASON TO FIND FAULT WITH SOMEONE

OR TO TAKE OFFENCE WITH ANOTHER,

THE APOSTLE SAYS WE ARE TO FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER.

---IN FACT, WE ARE TO BE IMITATORS OF CHRIST

WHO FORGAVE ALL WHO WOULD SEEK FORGIVENESS.

THE THOUGHT HEREIS THAT NONE OF US

COULD EVER BE IN A POSITION

WHERE THE WRONGS THAT MIGHT BE DONE TOWARD US

COULD COMPARE WITH THE WRONGS

WE HAVE COMMITTED AGAINST THE LORD.

THIS IS ACTUALLY A VERY ENCOURAGING PART
OF THE APOSTIL'S TEACHING.
AS YOU READ IN SCRIPTURE,
IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS...
THERE IS NO ILLUSION THAT THE CHURCH
WILL BE A COMMUNITY OF PERFECT PEOPLE
.....TO THE CONTRARY,
THERE WILL BE DIFFICULTIES BETWEEN PEOPLE
AND THE GRACE OF FORGIVENESS WILL BE ESSENTIAL
TO ALLOW THE COMMUNITY TO FUNCTION PROPERLY.

b. LOVE IS WHAT PERFECTS THE CHURCH.

THE NUMBER ONE QUALITY CHRISTIANS
ARE TO HAVE TOWARD EACH OTHER IS *LOVE*.

"CLOTHE YOURSELVES WITH LOVE,"

RECOGNIZES THAT THE LOVE WE NEED
COMES FROM BEYOND US
AND IS NOT THE NATURAL FIRST RESPONSE
FROM THE DEPTHS OF OUR HEARTS...

THIS IS THE LOVE OF CHRIST
THAT COMES TO US FROM THE HEART OF CHRIST.

WE BEGIN TO RECOGNIZE, AT THIS POINT....

THAT WE ARE NOT CAPABLE OF

THAT KIND OF LOVE CHRIST REQUIRES OF US,
BUT WE ARE ABLE TO RECEIVE
OR “CLOTHE OURSELVES” WITH IT.

THERE IS A RICHNESS TO THE CONCEPT
OF LOVE BINDING THE WHOLE OF THE COMMUNITY
IN PERFECT HARMONY.

THE CHURCH IS THE PLACE
WHERE THE DIVINE LIFE MAY BE EXPERIENCED
IN FULL
AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

THAT BODY OF CHRIST (THE CHURCH) MUST BE
COMMITTED AND OBEDIENT
TO THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST TO
“...LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.”

c. COLOSSIANS STATES:

LET THE PEACE OF CHRIST RULE
AND OFFER PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING.

THAT IS REFERRED TO AS
THE DAILY BREAD OF THE CHURCH'S SOUL.
---THE PEACE OF CHRIST IS THAT PEACE
WHICH CAN BE FOUND IN NO OTHER PLACE
AND GAINED IN NO OTHER WAY

THAN TO LIVE TOGETHER

IN THE LOVE OF CHRIST

AND GRANT TO EACH OTHER

THE FORGIVENESS CHRIST GRANTS TO US.

“AND BE THANKFUL”

THE WRITER SAYS.

IT IS IN THANKSGIVING AND PRAISE

THAT WE OPEN OUR LIVES UP MORE FULLY

TO THE VISION OF GOD

AND THE REALITY OF SPIRITUAL THINGS.

OTHER, TROUBLESOME ISSUES

WILL BEGIN TO RECEDE INTO THE BACKGROUND

AS CHRISTIAN LIVING BECOMES MORE FULFILLING.

d. FINALLY.....IT IS THE WORD OF CHRIST

.....LIVING WITHIN US

THAT CAUSES THE CHURCH TO GROW.

THE WORD OF GOD IS FREQUENTLY REFERRED TO AS

“BREAD”

THE BREAD THAT FEEDS THE INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIAN

AND THE CHURCH.

THE LESSON CLOSES

WITH A NOTE OF PROFOUND JOY AND THANKSGIVING

ALMOST A HYMN OF PRAISE
OF GOD'S DESIGN FOR OUR LIVING TOGETHER
IN THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH.
THERE IS NO MORE POWERFUL WITNESS TO THE REALITY
AND THE LOVE OF GOD
THAN A FULLY FUNCTIONING BODY OF CHRIST
WHERE THE LIFE OF GOD IS EVIDENT IN THE LIFE OF THE PEOPLE.

ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THAT
– THERE IS NO MORE DEVASTATING DAMAGE
THAT CAN BE DONE
TO THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST
THAN A DYSFUNCTIONAL CHURCH
WHERE THE LOVE OF GOD IS SCARCE
AND BITTERNESS OVERWHELMS
THE GRACE OF FORGIVENESS!!!!
WHAT A WONDERFUL THING IT WOULD BE
IF WE WERE TO ALLOW THE CHRISTMAS SEASON
TO BE THE BEGINNING OF A TIME
OF COMMITTING OURSELVES
TO "GROWING UP" IN THE LOVE AND GRACE OF GOD!