

“Follow Wear”

Today we're in the fourth week of a series designed to challenge us to take the “Next Steps” in our faith walk with Christ. We've covered a lot of ground in the first few weeks. If you go back to week one, we started with the recognition that being a sinner or (for that matter) even an unbeliever does not disqualify a person from becoming a follower. Every one of Jesus followers were sinners and every one of those he called (who became believers) started as unbelievers.

What that means (for all of us), no matter where we're at in our faith, how many questions we still have, it doesn't matter. The first step in following Jesus is to take that first step, and (from there) to begin taking the next steps.

Last week, the focus was in relation to where this is all going. What's the end game in being a follower of Jesus? The answer is: it's not what so many people think. The end game for Jesus (although it's important) is not making it into heaven. That's not the primary message of his ministry. His primary message had to do with life here on this earth.

“Fear not” is what he said. “Don't be afraid” is what he wants for us in life. We're going to get to heaven. That day is going to come, sooner than we might expect. He's done that for us on the cross. He did that for you when he came back to life. Heaven is yours in Jesus. Eternity with God belongs to you because of Christ. Until then, the end game is to have faith. The goal (in following Jesus) is to stop focusing on our fears and put our faith (and our focus) on him.

Today, this series takes us in a bit of a different direction and asks the question, (I know) we've all been wanting to ask, “What do followers of Jesus wear?” (What do followers of Jesus wear?) “If I'm a follower of Jesus, if I want to become one of his disciples, what should I wear?”

Now, that's a natural question to ask, because no matter who you are following, people know (who you're following) by what you wear. I don't have to tell you who these folks are following. What they are wearing gives it away. Take a look at this first one. (Picture of Packer fans); I like what I see. These are some smart followers. How about this one? (Picture of Giants fans.) I'm not quite as (on board) with this team, but what they're wearing gives it away.

Alright, it's easy with teams. What about with followers of Jesus? Is this what Jesus wants us to wear? (John 3:16 shirt) Or how about this, on the far other end of the spectrum...the far other end (picture of placards). Makes you want to join, right? Wrong.

What do followers of Jesus wear? How does Jesus want his followers to be identified by others? When others look at one of his followers, what does he want (those others) to see?

It's interesting (in the New Testament) how the apostle Paul, who wrote almost half of it, how he goes after this very question. In the letters he writes to the different churches, what he does is he leverages one of the most important teachings of Jesus. He takes what was most important to Jesus and he presents it in ways that are easy to understand and to follow.

The teaching he takes, the one he picks up on and passes on to us, is one of the last things Jesus said (to his disciples) before he was to go to the cross. We read it here this morning. John, chapter 13: (Jesus says), “A new command I give you: love one another.” (A new command I give you: love one another.)

Now, maybe you're thinking, “That's not such a new command. (I'm sure his disciples were thinking that.) This is nothing new.” Jesus agrees; (he says) it's not, but he doesn't stop there. He says, “A new command I give you: love one another.” (And here's where he ups the bar.) He says, “As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

In other words, (Jesus says) I don't want to love one another as you love one another. (I know you love one another.) You one another (each other) all the time. But I don't want you to one another each other as you one another each other. I want you to one another each other as I have one anothered you.

(Can't you just picture it?) Remember what happened, Matthew, when you were sitting at that tax collectors booth. Peter (when we walked by), he wanted to spit on you. (He didn't like what you were doing.)

But before he had a chance and before you even knew what this was all about. (You weren't a believer.) Before all of that, what did I say to you? I said, "Follow me." I said, "I know you don't believe in me, you don't deserve this, but I want you to join me and follow." (Do you remember that?) "From now on, I want you to love these others (I've given you) as I have loved you."

"And, how about you, Nathanael? Do you remember what you did when we first met? Do you remember what you said? You said, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Do you remember that, how you dissed my whole family, the entire town where I grew up, all of my relatives? Do you remember saying that? You didn't believe in me, but I still called you to follow. What I want you to do from now on is to love those (around you) as I have loved you."

That's how Jesus wants us to live. That's how Jesus wants you to live. But it doesn't stop there. (And this is what the apostle Paul picks up on in his letters.) Jesus says, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another...By this (Jesus says) all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Not as you love one another, but as I have loved you. Not as the world loves one another, but as I have loved the world. That's how the world will know that you belong to me.

This is the mark of the Christian life. This is what sets us apart. It's not that we go to church on Sunday mornings. (We do that, but that's not what sets us apart.) It's not that we read the Bible and pray. Those are good things, and we do those things, but that's not the distinguishing mark. The distinguishing mark, what sets us apart, is that we are to love one another as Jesus has loved us. By this (Jesus said) the world will see that something is different in your life, because of the someone (in your life) who has made you different.

The apostle Paul picks up on this in his letters. Colossians, chapter three, is where he spells it out. In fact, what he does is he tells us this is what Christians are supposed to wear. This is the clothing (by which) the world will know that you and I belong to him.

Here's what he says. "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves..." Here's what you're to put on. Here's what you're to wear. "...clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." Those are the clothes Jesus wants you to wear. Those are the characteristics that will identify you as one of his followers.

You're to "clothe yourself...with compassion: that means that you're to do everything you can to put yourself in that other person's shoes. Instead of judging them, trying to fit them into your shoes, you're to step into theirs and treat them as a brother or sister in Christ...with compassion.

With kindness: kindness (as a Christian) isn't just being a nice person. It's being a nice person even when the other person isn't being nice. It's easy to be nice when the other person is nice. It's not so easy when they're not...but that's how we're to act...with kindness.

With humility: do you know what humility is? Humility is not thinking of yourself as less than you are. (It's not that at all.) What it is is seeing that other person as they are and (as you are) in relation to God. Standing before God, we're all in need. (We're all beggars in the sight of God.) As Christians, we're to put on humility in every relationship...every day.

With gentleness: being gentle as a Christian means that we're always to be caring and careful in what we do and say, and how we say and do it. Our words and our actions can show we care, or they can (just as easily) show we don't. Gentleness is one of the ways in which your faith will become evident. We're to act with gentleness.

And with patience: patience is nothing more than being willing to walk with that other person at their speed, at a pace they are ready and willing (in life) to take. It's not that we can't encourage and challenge and maybe even (sometimes) push, but we dare not push too hard or too fast, or we might push them away from Christ...with patience.

As followers of Jesus, (Paul says) these are the things with which we are to clothe ourselves every day. When you get up in the morning, this is what Jesus wants you to wear. This is what he wants you to be known by.

And then he summarizes what he says with a couple of big thoughts. Verse thirteen, (he says), "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." This goes back to the main idea, that we are to love one another as we have been loved by Christ.

And then he says, (and here's the umbrella that covers it all), "And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." Again, it goes back to the same command that we're to love one another.

And so, here's the list, (show on screen) and I'll be honest, it's quite a list and (as a list) it's not easy to follow. (It's not.) And it's not even natural. If it were natural, we'd already be doing it. (It's not, and so we're not.) But it is possible and it can happen. And it can happen as we take the next steps in following Jesus, because when you follow Jesus, what might otherwise be impossible becomes possible.

Now, the trouble with a sermon like this is that it's easy to remember (while you're here), but when you leave here (and you're not), that's when it's easy to forget. So, I came across this way of remembering it, and I'll tell you (up front), this is a bit lame. It really is. Say it with me: "That's lame." (That's lame.) Alright.

So here's what I want you to remember. Have you ever been to "Chick Flick, rated PG?" Have you ever been to a "Chick Flick, rated PG?" That's what I want you to remember. (show on screen)

There it is. "Chick Flick, PG. Chick Flick, PG." That's lame. You're welcome; now there's no excuse.

So here's what I want you to do. I want you to get up tomorrow morning and put on these clothes...

Compassion: As you start the day, ask God to help you step into that other person's shoes to understand what they're dealing with, before making a judgment.

Humility: Pray, "God, help me to see that other person through your eyes, as a child of yours, loved eternally in Christ."

Kindness: "Lord, help me to be nice, and not just when others are nice. Help me to be kind, even when it's hard to be kind."

Forgiveness: "As a sinner, Lord, give me the strength to forgive, and not because they deserve it, but because you've forgiven me."

Love: "Jesus, let the same love that you showed to me on the cross be the kind of love that sets me apart."

Kindness: It's there again; a need for an extra dose, because you can't ever be too kind.

Patience: If there's anything we all need, it's a bit more of this. Lord, help me to walk at that other person's pace, even when I want to run.

And Gentleness: "Father, before I say or do anything, help me to say it or do it in a gentle and a caring way."

There's it is. Put it on every day. Those are the clothes we're to wear. If not those, then what? (What's the choice?) To wear this? (show John 3:16 and placards). People who wear this, wear it to make a point.

Jesus didn't come to make a point. He came to die on a cross and rise from the dead, and to change life (and to give life) to anyone willing to follow.

This isn't about making a point. It's about making a difference, an eternal difference, in the lives of others. Jesus did that for you. Now he wants to do that through you. Let's each put it on...beginning tomorrow...every day...and see what happens. "Chick Flick. PG."

Let's pray.