

Old Testament: Psalm 136: 1 - 16 & 23 - 26
New Testament: 1 Corinthians 13: 4 - 8a
Sermon Text: Colossians 3: 12 - 17

Please pray with me. And now Lord God may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be pleasing and acceptable in Thy sight, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Throughout the first third of this calendar year I have worked to show that living in rhythm with God and with one another is possible. I have been using Colossians 3: 12 - 17 as a launch point to discuss various characteristics we can clothe ourselves in and subsequent actions that come as a direct result of these characteristics. I have been going back to the original Greek and been using supplemental texts to further clarify what exactly those characteristics and actions look and feel like. When we choose compassion that wells up from deep within our inmost being; when we choose kindness that has integrity; when we treat people the same to their face and behind their back; when we choose humility and meekness; when we choose patience, when we choose to stick with one another even despite unintentional, and sometimes intentional, provocation; then we are enabled to be constantly bearing with one another. Not sometimes, not when the fancy strikes us, not when we're up to it, but always. We are all individuals trying to move forward together. And some of us don't want to move forward; we want to move backwards! So, we're not always going to get along. We're not always going to agree with one another's ideas. But that should not cripple us, should not disable us from bearing with one another. Sometimes, as my parents would say when I was growing up, you just have to grin and bear it. They are right. But what they missed, that Paul does not, is that having compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience, makes "grinning and bearing it" so much more achievable *and* tolerable. Not only are we enabled to be constantly bearing with one another but we are enabled to be constantly forgiving one another, just as God has forgiven each one of us. You know, forgiveness is a two way street. Your expectation should not be that the pastor is only responsible for forgiving you. There needs to be some forgiveness coming back towards me as well. I have very limited, no make that zero, control over broader cultural and global trends. All I can do is evaluate those through a Good News lens of love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness. I can offer certainty about three things; everything else is up to God which means a LOT of shades of gray and more uncertainty than many people are comfortable with. But despite that, because of the three certainties, I can offer something even more valuable than those. Hope. So, when I don't meet *your* individual expectations sometimes, I'm going to humbly request some forgiveness coming back in my direction just as I continue to practice forgiveness towards each one of you.

We have also noted characteristics that do not facilitate living in rhythm. Paul catalogs a few of them in the preceding verses and we added a few extra in our work two weeks ago from Ephesians 4, which was one of our supporting texts. Anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk, corrupting talk, bitterness, and clamor must all be set aside, or even completely put away, to enable the positive characteristics previously discussed and subsequent actions to mature and flourish within a community. To facilitate the broader communal growth and health, as we individually work on clothing ourselves in positive characteristics, leading to positive actions and outcomes, to leave aside, we put away negative ones.

After all of this we finally come to verse 14 today in our work through the Colossians passage. Let me read it again to refresh your memory as to what it says. A couple of interesting things to note. So I'm going to teach briefly before I get back to preaching. One, the translation committee adds a verb where there is none. I assume this is for ease of reading or to help us make sense. But Paul simply says, above all these things is love. Love is above everything, characteristics and actions, I've discussed up to this juncture. Second, what the translators render "harmony" is actually, and here's that word again, wholeness or completeness. Specifically, this time the word is *τελειότητος* which shares the common root *τελος*. And this brings us back to Jesus' words in Matthew 5:48. Therefore, y'all be constantly being whole and complete just as your Heavenly Father already is whole and complete.

If Paul insists that love is above all these things it begs the questions, *why* does Paul insist that love is above all these things? Deuteronomy 6:4-5. Mark 12:30 - 31. Psalm 136. 1 Corinthians 13:8a. This all encompassing, steadfast, never ending love that defines God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is eternal. It has no beginning. It has no end. It has no boundaries. God cannot not love. To do so would go against God's own very being. It completely follows, it makes rational sense then that love is the binding agent which holds all things together. And that love is that which enables us individually, and together, to move towards wholeness and completeness. We are not going to move towards this wholeness that God already has while we continue to envy what others have that we do not have. We are not going to move towards this wholeness that God already has while we continue to boast about what we do have. We are not going to move towards this wholeness that God already has while we continue to be haughtily arrogant towards one another. We are not going to move towards this wholeness that God already has while we continue to be rude and disrespectful to one another. We are not going to move towards this wholeness that God already has while we continue to insist on our way. We are not going to move towards this wholeness that God already has while we continue to choose irritability and resentfulness. We are not going to move towards this wholeness that God already has while we continue to tolerate and even rejoice in the wrongdoing of others and

refuse to hold them accountable. Love and love alone moves us in the direction the wholeness and completeness that God already is.

Choose love this day; and everyday. Choose to move towards wholeness and completeness. Say no to the continuing strife, discord, and division. Say no to bitterness and wrath and envy that perpetuates these things. Say yes to love. Amen.