

# Sermons at Union Congregational Church

Preached by The Reverend Gail L. Miller, Pastor

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Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

Galatians 3:23-29

## Clothed with Christ

Clothes - some of us spend a lot of time on them - shopping, deciding, coordinating, washing...

In so many ways and settings, our clothes say a lot about us! So many professions have identifying clothes. The military alone... what looks like just a uniform to me, can be easily distinguished by those who serve in the various branches.

The day of the week and the time of the day will determine what clothes we choose: Will I be at my desk all day? Or am I seeing an important client? Am I going to dinner straight from work? And what kind of restaurant is it? Do I have to walk all over campus today? Or will I be in the library all day?

Then there's church - I love how differently we dress now than when I was a kid. For those who are in suits and professional clothes all week, Sunday is a chance to wear polo shirts and comfortable pants. For those who are casual all week, Sunday is a chance to wear a nice dress or a collared shirt.

Most of the time our clothes serve to define and distinguish us from others. But then there are times when our clothes serve to make us blend in and not stand out: School uniforms. British lawyers and judges everywhere. Pastors - we wear the robe so as not to draw attention to what we're wearing, but rather what we're saying.

The clothes we wear can change our mood and our demeanor. In the Kon Mari method of decluttering and organizing, we're to go to our closet....and ask of every item, "Does it spark joy?" And if not, get rid of it!

And it's true - we all have favorite outfits that give us comfort or confidence (or the opposite, make us uncomfortable and self-conscious).

In the Bible - the New Testament - the Apostle Paul uses the image of clothing a number of times. Most of the time he is encouraging us to "put on" qualities that will express our gratitude for Christ's dying for us. He is often writing to churches that need encouragement and advice.

Since Christ has loved us so much that he died for us, we should live lives that reflect that love so that when people wonder about what it means to follow Jesus, it's easy to see what a blessing it is and want to know more.

So we're to clothes ourselves with "righteousness" - compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience - all really excellent qualities that will serve us well in all arenas of our lives - at home, at school, at church, in politics...

And then there's the "Armor of God": Belt of truth, Shoes of readiness, Shield of faith, and the Helmet of salvation.

But today we hear: *As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*

Putting on Christ here has to do with baptism. And when Christians talk about baptism, we're talking about identity - belonging - not just WHO we are but WHOSE we are. And this is an identity that shapes and possibly changes everything.

Back in April a little piece of news came to the Anglican Communion - the predecessors to the Episcopal Church in America. The head of the Anglican .... Archbishop of Canterbury (crowns the Queen)

The current Archbishop - Justin Welby - discovered that his biological father was someone different than he thought it was. He (and his mother) released statements to the press sharing information as well as their personal reflections on the matter.

Here is part of his statement:

My own experience is typical of many people. To find that one's father is other than imagined is not unusual. To be the child of families with great difficulties in relationships, with substance abuse or other matters, is far too normal.

I know that I find who I am in Jesus Christ, not in genetics, and my identity in him never changes.

Although there are elements of sadness, and even tragedy in my father's (Gavin Welby's) case, this is a story of redemption and hope from a place of tumultuous difficulty and near despair in several lives. It is a testimony to the grace and power of Christ to liberate and redeem us, grace and power which is offered to every human being.

At the very outset of my inauguration service three years ago, Evangeline Kanagasooriam, a young member of the Canterbury Cathedral congregation, said: "We greet you in the name of Christ. Who are you, and why do you request entry?" To which I responded: "I am Justin, a servant of Jesus Christ, and I come as one seeking the grace of God to travel with you in His service together." What has changed? Nothing!

There is no existential crisis, and no resentment against anyone. My identity is founded in who I am in Christ.

Yes! It should be so for all of us!

But our baptism - being clothed with Christ - is NOT a personal matter. Baptisms are a sacrament of the CHURCH and say more about our relationships with one another than about God's relationship to us as individuals.

Listen to what comes next!

*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*

When our identity is in Christ it changes more than our own personal lives - it changes society and the world we live in - because Christ is the great equalizer.

The issue for the church Paul is writing to here is that since Jesus was Jewish, do those who follow him have to be Jewish first and then followers of Christ? Or can you go straight to following Jesus?

Paul's answer is - these distinctions don't matter - follow Christ and you are automatically heirs of the promises declared before you ever knew them.

Whoever you are, wherever you're from, whatever you wear...it doesn't matter  
In Christ it all becomes new. Your identity is shaped by the one who gives himself in self-sacrificial love.

As we wear that identity, we become more and more conformed to Him who loves us with this love we cannot comprehend, because it includes EVERYONE!

We're so quick to put people in categories. And without even knowing it we draw lines around who can go where, who can do what.

Watch this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CNLml4B2euM&feature=youtu.be>

We don't mean to - but we do - it's trained into us at a young age!

But the Bible says - Not that! Go out of your way to welcome ALL people - who are one in Christ anyway!

Amen!