



love

OCTOBER 27

Sunday, October 27, 2024

***Do Unto Others Kindness Campaign: LOVE***

“Election Day Fashion Tips” | Colossians 3:12-17 | Charlie Berthoud

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We are just ten days from a very important election. Because of the importance of this election, today I want to help you think about a very important decision that we each have to make on Election Day: What clothes should you wear? I have some fashion tips for you. And these fashion tips are actually good any day, not just Election Day. Our scripture reading for today makes some explicit fashion suggestions for those of us who call ourselves Christians. Listen for God’s word from the little book of Colossians:

As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Clothe yourselves in compassion, kindness, humility, patience, and above all clothe yourselves with love.

These words come of us on the seventh and final Sunday of our KINDNESS campaign, when we have been campaigning for KINDNESS, COMPASSION, JUSTICE and more. During this contentious election season, we need to remind ourselves who we are and what we’re all about. Today our “campaign” focus is LOVE.



We have our yard signs out, not advocating for particular candidates or parties, but advocating for principles inspired by our faith.

The foundation for the series comes from Jesus himself, who taught us in Matthew 7:12 “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” This is known as the golden rule, and we can paraphrase it as treat people the way you’d like to be treated. We are Christians. We follow Jesus who said that the most important thing is LOVE. Love of God, of neighbor, of ourselves, and even of our enemies. So, this idea of clothing ourselves with love is a good one, as we think about how to love our neighbors and our enemies.

As I’ve mentioned from this pulpit before, I try to remember this Colossians passage every morning as I get dressed. On days when I’m not rushed or distracted, as I put on my clothes, I will pray that God clothe me with compassion, kindness, and love.

I need daily reminders like this, especially in a time when it’s all too easy to put on the clothes of bitterness, negativity, contempt, and despair.

So, Election Day Fashion Tip #1 is:  
Clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, and love.

While being compassion, kind, and loving might sound simplistic and trite, I really believe that such traits are crucial not only for Christian living but for the wellbeing of our society.

Yesterday I went for a short bike ride, and near the end, a car stopped to intentionally help me get through a busy intersection. I waved at the driver, and he had a big smile. So, 40-year-old man in the gray sedan, thank you. You made my day better.

Any act of kindness puts some positive energy into the world.

This is what the gospel is all about: through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God is putting good into the world, with the hope that we would be changed by it.

The second fashion tip comes from the final chapter of the little book of Ephesians, one of my favorite books in the Bible.

I opened the series on September 15 with a verse from Ephesians, and on that Sunday, I mentioned that Ephesians is one of my favorite books in the Bible.

In chapter one, Paul is praying for his followers to be wise and to have the eyes of their heart opened to God's saving love.

In chapter two, we learn that we are saved for a purpose, a life of good works.

For by grace you have been saved through faith.... we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works....(Eph. 2.8-10)

In chapter three, we are encouraged to be strong and to be rooted and grounded in God's love, to have a solid foundation.

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit <sup>and</sup> that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. (3.16-17)

In chapter four, we are reminded that we might get angry when things are bad, but we are to avoid sin in our response, and part of that response involves choosing our words carefully, for the sake of the common good.

Be angry but do not sin.... Let no evil talk come out of your mouths but only what is good for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. (Eph. 4.26,29)

We focused on these verses at the beginning of the series, on the first Sunday when the word was KINDNESS. I encouraged people to remember the verse discouraging evil talk from our mouths whenever we brush our teeth.

In chapter five, Paul encourages us to make good use of our time. When I put on my watch in the morning, I think of this verse, prayerfully asking God to help me to make good choices during the day.

Be careful, then, how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time.... So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (Eph. 5.15-17)

In chapter six of Ephesians, the final chapter of this little letter, we're invited to clothe ourselves with military gear, to "put on the whole armor of God."

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power; put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.... (Eph. 6.10)

So, fashion tip #2 is:

To put on the whole armor of God.

Paul wrote about the power of demonic forces in the world, encouraging his followers to be ready with clothing like the breastplate of righteousness and the belt of truth, shield of faith and the sandals of peace, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which the letter says is the word of God.

I'm not suggesting that when you got to vote you strap on a sword and put on a helmet and breastplate. But this text reminds us of the reality of evil in the world, so we need to be wise and courageous when we vote, and in our daily living.

THEME Today is Reformation Sunday, when we celebrate being a Reformed church always in the process of being reformed.

We also celebrate the courage of the reformers who literally risked their lives—and sometimes gave their lives—to stand up for truth and righteousness in the 1500s. We remember those who put on the whole armor of God, sometimes literal armor, in the effort to make this world a better place.

Martin Luther wrote "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" in 1529, reflecting the reality of struggle in this life, implicitly reminding Christians to put on the full armor of God.

And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,  
we will not fear, for God hath willed his truth to triumph through us.  
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him.  
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure.

The struggle continues into our era. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Timothy T'ingfang Lew, a Chinese Christian, wrote a hymn called "O Christ the Great Foundation" in the wake of the first world war.

Where tyrants' hold is tightened, where strong devour the weak,  
where innocents are frightened, the righteous fear to speak,  
there let your church awaking attack the powers of sin  
and, all their ramparts breaking, with you the victory win.

Here in Madison, we are usually sheltered from the reality of the power of evil and demonic forces in the world. This power comes in a variety of ways, and part of the Christian life is being ready for the fight.

As citizens of God's kingdom, we need to stand against tyranny and injustice, against cruelty and evil.

With legitimate concerns about our democracy right now, we may need to put on the full armor of God for the sake of justice and righteousness.

One of the creeds of the Presbyterian Church reminds us of the call to be involved in the struggle for good. In "A Brief Statement of Faith" we affirm the reality of suffering and our calling to respond with courage:

In a broken and fearful world  
the Spirit gives us courage  
to pray without ceasing,  
to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,  
to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,  
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,  
and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.

Jesus put it well saying, "Seek first God's kingdom."

Fashion tip #1: Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, and love

Fashion tip #2: Put on the full armor of God

Fashion tip #3 has to do with what NOT to wear and the possibility of taking off some clothes:

“Take off your jerseys” is tip #3.



The 2019 book *I Think You're Wrong (But I'm Listening): A Guide to Grace-Filled Political Discussions* is a helpful and profoundly relevant book for our time.

One of our new members gave me the book a few weeks ago, and it's fascinating. Co-written by two women, one Republican and one Democrat, the longest chapter in the book is called “Take Off Your Jersey” in which they lament the hyper partisanship in our world today.

They write with frustration how politics has become some a team sport, with people wearing a red jersey or a blue jersey, refusing to recognize any validity in someone on the “other team,” thinking to goal is to beat the other team, but forgetting that we're all on the same team as citizens of this country, and this planet.

They write:

“Partisan jerseys are inherently disconnecting, running afoul of historic and enduring teachings of faith. By behaving as though our identities as Republican or Democrat define us, we are defining ourselves oppositionally: ‘I am because I am against my neighbors who think differently.’ This is not who we were created to be.” (p. 46)

In the ensuing chapters they make a strong case for listening and learning and finding common ground with chapters on:

- Get curious
- Embrace the paradox

- Exit the echo chamber
- Give grace
- Keep it nuanced

In two weeks, we celebrate two baptisms. The traditional baptismal liturgy involves new clothes, putting on a new garment as one is welcomed into the Christian family. Some churches baptize people in special white gowns. We generally aren't as concerned with the literal clothing, but in baptism, we take on the new garment of God's love in Jesus Christ.

Today, we welcome ten new members. They are getting gift bags, with a Covenant mug, a book of scripture, candy, and more. We didn't include Covenant t-shirts, but we have plenty, so if you want one, let me know. Our church t-shirt is a good fashion tip for any day, helping us to remember our calling to love our neighbors and seek first God's kingdom.

Today with new members and in two weeks with baptisms, we are making and renewing our vows as God's people, to help each other on the Christian journey. It's a good time to make a commitment to be a well-dressed congregation by

- Taking off our partisan jerseys and seeking the common good
- Being ready to put on the full armor of God, to have strength and courage to join the struggle when necessary
- Every day, no matter what is going on, clothing ourselves with kindness, compassion, and love.

Amen.

### Election Day Fashion Tips

1. Clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, and love
2. Put on the full armor of God
3. Take off your jersey



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