

Dear members and friends of St. John Lutheran,

Consider the following words, written by St. Paul in Colossians chapter 3:

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ 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. (ESV)

I believe that good Lutherans understand this text better than most other Christians, because **we are students of God's Word which we know is divided between Law and Gospel**. Other churches will point you to this text as God's demand for you. For instance, they'll say...

1. **You are** to put on compassion – having a heavy heart for the poor and the lost.
2. **You are** to put on kindness – being kind to that person that is so hard to like – the hotheads or jerks that treat you without respect – to those you are to be kind.
3. **You are** to put on humility – instead of seeking the limelight – trying to get the credit for something that was done – lowering yourself to do the menial tasks of life – you are to be like that.

We could go on with the text. The Law-based church down the road is going to tell you to **do** all these things if you want to be a Christian. And so people get up in the morning, knowing that yesterday was a bust, and hoping upon hope that somehow they can reach deep down inside of themselves to resurrect a new man or new woman that will do what the Law demands. If they're honest about their lives, they see themselves as **bad Christians** for not doing what God says.

The good Lutheran gets up in the morning and says, "Dear Lord, yesterday I fell short of what you want for me. I didn't study your Word, I didn't seek you when things started to unravel. Instead, I turned to myself for the strength and the wisdom, and I failed. Help me today to rely on your strength, your wisdom, your might – by coming to me through your Word and in doing so, kill the old Adam in me, allowing You to emerge. Help me to be compassionate, kind, humble, meek, and patient. Bind it all together in love – so that I can love even in the face of hatred and rejection."

Lutherans know better than any other single church on earth that **only God can make us new and whole**. There's **nothing innate inside of us** that can help us **to change ourselves**. God's Spirit works through His Word as the agent of change. But notice that **the Word** is necessary.

Just praying for this, while being blissfully ignorant of God's Holy Word **will not work**. Satan is always waiting to trick you with some witty little sayings like, "Charity begins in the home." Wrong. The Bible never says that – period. Charity begins with God. And your ability to show love and charity

depends on you being in God's Word. That's just one example of axioms **that people live by, and are led astray by** – because they **don't want to commit to what Jesus demands of us** in John chapter 15 verse 4: "*Remain in me, and I will remain in you.*" He saying, study my Word and I will well-up in you richly.

Unfortunately, Lutherans are also some of the worst offenders of not being in God's Word.

Since we know that God is the only one who can change us to be like him, it's very easy to **blame God** for not doing enough. Why hasn't God been more faithful? If God's **not doing His job**, maybe we can blow-off the need to be compassionate, to be humble, to be kind, to be meek and patient, and **just be ourselves?**

Our text above says: "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*" Notice the call to be in worship – singing psalms and hymns? And that part of about the word of Christ dwelling in us richly? Do you think that that's going to happen by osmosis? Think again.

Ideally, that takes....

- 1), daily devotions or Scripture readings,
- 2), group Bible study (weekly),
- 3), weekly church attendance.

At a minimum, you should be connected through at least one of the first two items listed above, and item 3) without question. This is necessary to even have a chance to fend off **Satan's attacks, a world that misleads, and a sinful heart** that wants to run away from God's word.

As Lutherans, we have a great understanding of how God works, and what He expects of us as we live out this life He has given us. But understanding it, and letting God dwell in us and change us, are two different things. Are you in a Bible study? Do you have a plan to read Scripture each day (by the way, you don't have to try to read the entire Bible in a year)? Maybe your goal is to read the New Testament in a year. There are numerous Bible reading plans available that will help you achieve your goal (open our hymnal to page 299, and you will see one such plan). When you're using a devotional, read the Bible text first, think about what it means to you, and then read the short story that adds depth to the text. There are group Bible studies that you can join. God is just waiting to meet you in His word! How do I know this? He says so: "*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.*" (Matt 7:7-8, ESV) May God start richly dwelling in you – just as He promises. Amen.

Pastor Travis