

### **First Reading is Psalm 148:1-14**

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD!  
Praise the LORD from the heavens;  
praise him in the heights!  
<sup>2</sup> Praise the LORD, all his angels;  
praise him, all his host!  
<sup>3</sup> Praise the LORD, sun and moon;  
praise him, all you shining stars!  
<sup>4</sup> Praise the LORD, you highest heavens,  
and you waters above the heavens!  
<sup>5</sup> Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for he commanded and they were created.  
<sup>6</sup> The LORD established them forever and ever;  
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.  
<sup>7</sup> Praise the LORD from the earth,  
you sea monsters and all deeps,  
<sup>8</sup> fire and hail, snow and frost,  
stormy wind fulfilling his command!  
<sup>9</sup> Mountains and all hills,  
fruit trees and all cedars!  
<sup>10</sup> Wild animals and all cattle,  
creeping things and flying birds!  
<sup>11</sup> Kings of the earth and all peoples,  
princes and all rulers of the earth!  
<sup>12</sup> Young men and women alike,  
old and young together!  
<sup>13</sup> Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for his name alone is exalted;  
his glory is above earth and heaven.  
<sup>14</sup> The LORD has raised up a horn for his people,  
praise for all his faithful,  
for the people of Israel who are close to him.  
Praise the LORD!

### **Second Reading is Colossians 3:12-17**

<sup>12</sup> As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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.

The year 2018 is almost in the books. As we pause this Sunday to worship, I wonder what comes to mind for you about this year? Do thoughts of praise like the psalmist's come to mind? "Praise the Lord, for the Lord's name alone is exalted?" Does praise for God's provision for you and your family throughout the year come to mind? Or does relief well up as you close the chapter on a trying year for you or the ones you love? Whenever we pause to reflect, emotions and thoughts will surface, yet what we do with them will determine our next steps.

I know as I reflect on this past year, gratitude wells up within me personally. I am so grateful for my family, for their unfailing love and incredible support of my calling as a pastor. My husband and sons were here yesterday voluntarily doing demo work to prepare for the construction of the new presbytery office and janitor closet in JKH. I am grateful for my second cancer free year, for health and wellness which means I can play softball, go snow skiing and play plenty of golf with my family. I am grateful for what we have accomplished together as a church and for how the Lord is moving among us. I am grateful for your support of my calling and for my leadership among you.

Yet, reflecting on 2018 also causes some concerns to surface, personally, as well as for our church, our city, nation and world. Will we work together as a church to envision a future with hope, especially if our personal desires for this church differ? Will we work together in this city to address with dignity and respect those without homes? Will we work together to provide equitable services across the whole city, as we continue to address economic disparities in our city? Will the clergy of this city continue to work together to promote peace among all faith traditions? As a nation, I wonder if we will welcome with dignity and respect the huddled masses yearning to be free at our borders? Will we address the systemic racism embedded in our systems and structures? Will we work collaboratively to address gun violence, so that mass shootings are no longer common place? Will we recognize the importance of providing mental health services as well as medical services for all people? Will nations realize that we are one human family and stop warring against each other. Will nations realize that our one beautiful planet we call earth is in distress?

As I reflect on the year about to close and envision the year that is about to unfold, gratitude as well as concerns well up for me. What about you? What feelings of gratitude or concerns well up for you, for our church, city, nation and world?

This pause between the old and the new is a good time to hear again these words from Apostle Paul, "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved." These words remind us whose we are. These words remind us of our identity. We are God's holy and beloved children. Holy, not because of our right behaviors or effort. We are holy because we were created in God's image. We are loved for the God who created our very nature is love. We are chosen by God, not for privilege, but for service. And in order to serve God faithfully, Paul reminds the church at Corinth and this church here in Redlands, to clothe ourselves with the proper attire: "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourself."

In the church I grew up in, there used to be an unwritten Sunday dress code. There may have been an unwritten dress code here, too. Suits and ties for men and dresses for women. I remember as a little girl always getting my new Easter dress, for dresses, not pants or shorts, were worn to church. But, when I was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade a new pastor was called. Well, his teenage children showed up for worship one summer Sunday in shorts and flip flops. Although they

weren't barred from attending worship, the church exploded with concerns about proper worship attire.

Yet, who do you think was offended by these teenagers who didn't dress the proper way? Do you think God was offended or was it the people who were offended? My guess is that God was just delighted that the teenagers showed up! God probably wasn't offended, but the people certainly were.

"As God's chosen, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Notice it doesn't say clothe yourself in a suit and tie or a dress! It is not our human-made clothes that God is necessarily worried about. What's more important to God is our character or the attire of our hearts.

You might remember that Jesus confronted the Pharisees about being all dressed up on the outside, but a mess on the inside, for he said, "You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of decay." Well-dressed churchgoers – those that met the dress standards that Sunday morning in my childhood - might very well have not been clothed properly according to this passage!

When you get up in the morning do you remember to put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience before you head out the door or even out of your bed? Clothed with compassion we would understand another's pain as well as have the desire to somehow mitigate the pain. Are you willing to enter into the pain of another? This is compassion at work within us, whether it is coming along side someone who is grieving, someone who recently received a devastating diagnosis, someone who experienced a tragedy, someone who is struggling with addiction, someone who is fleeing an unsafe living condition. Clothed with compassion we are to be willing to come along side or even step into someone else's shoes.

"Be kind" is a slogan you might see on a T-shirt or a bumper sticker these days. Just be kind is the hope and call of this reminder in a world that often is not. Be gentle, like be kind, reminds us that simple thoughtful actions can influence the course of someone's day.

Humility is not a highly prized attribute in our culture. We are schooled with being number one, the best, the brightest. Yet, we are reminded here to not think more highly of ourselves than we do of others. Humility reminds us that we are all God's holy and beloved children. Clothing ourselves with patience is similar. It reminds us that we don't always know the whole story. All of these articles of clothing remind us that we are just one of many.

But Paul doesn't stop with these articles of clothing, he continues with forbearance and forgiveness. A synonym for forbearance is tolerance. Imagine how different this world would be if we were tolerant of each other, especially those with whom we differ? Imagine a world where we were able to forgive those who wronged us or offended us, rather than lash out or harbor anger and resentment. Wouldn't name calling, bullying, fighting, violence and war become obsolete, if tolerance and forgiveness were part of our daily wardrobes, along with patience, gentleness, humility, kindness and compassion? After listing the fruit of the Spirit for the church at Galatia, Paul writes, "There is no law against such things." We can be as forgiving and tolerant, kind and gentle, patient and compassionate as we want, because these articles of clothing will usher in the world God images for us.

Now there is one more essential, all-purpose, article of clothing and Paul is quick to say what happens if we forget to put it on. He says that without love we are like "a noisy gong or

clanging cymbal.” Love is essential, because God is love. Love is to be our signature witness. The wardrobe Paul suggests we pull from everyday has two additional accessories: peace and gratitude.

So, let me summarize what we are to clothe ourselves in every day according to Apostle Paul: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, love, peace, and gratitude.

Today, we have baptized Benaiah and Isabella, welcoming them into the family of God. What will our daily actions teach them about the God whom we worship? Will they know that they are holy and beloved? Will they experience compassion and kindness? Will they learn to express gratitude?

Every time we gather around the baptismal font, we are given the opportunity to reflect on our own response to the God who chose us first in love. Baptism, especially of precious children like Benaiah and Isabella, remind us that God loved us first. Love is possible for us, because of God’s love generously poured into us.

But, how are we to clothe ourselves with these qualities? I concur with the guidance given to us by Apostle Paul: allow the word of Christ to dwell in us richly. Our holy bible is a never-ending love story, for God never gives up on us. Even though we stumble and fall or even turn our backs, God pursues us and offers us mercy, grace and love.

I wonder what verses or biblical stories come to mind for you, which remind you of God’s unfailing love for you?

I always begin with Isaiah 43: “I have created you, I have formed you. Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name, you are mine... you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you.” As well as Psalm 139, “For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” These scriptures remind me that God created me and loves me, as well as created you and loves you. John’s first letter reminds us that God is love. And Genesis reminds us that we are created in God’s image. Love is in our DNA. It is the essential, all-purpose garment we are given at birth.

So, as 2018 comes to a close and 2019 is about to dawn, I suggest we all take a look at what is in our wardrobes? Is there some cleaning that needs to take place, some garments that need to be removed... resentment, anger, apathy, jealousy, greed, slander, hate, resignation, or ... you fill in the blank? What needs to be removed from your wardrobe?

Apostle Paul says as he closes this passage, “Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Our everyday words and deeds bear witness to the God we claim to worship. As I have said before, “You may be the only bible someone reads.” So, do our words and deeds bear witness to a God of love who is compassionate and patient, forbearing and forgiving?

Holy and beloved, you are precious, honored and loved. Believe this and then clothe yourself each and every day so that others will be drawn to our loving God through you. Amen.