

Enough... to Wear Colossians 3:1-11

In this series of messages, which I'm calling *Enough*, the key verse comes from Philippians 4: "For I have learned the secret of being content in any situation, whether in plenty or want, whether well fed or hungry. I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. Christ is *enough*. In any and every situation, whether things are going well or everything is falling apart – I can do all things through Christ. Christ is enough.

Today, the great good news is that Christ is enough for us to become the people we are meant to be. All of us are people in process – none of us are finished products. Wherever you are in your life, you're "under construction." Infants and children and youth are under construction, and that's why we put so much energy into education and nurture and formation for young people. But adults are under construction too, even the ones who get into their 70's, 80's, 90's, and 100's! We're making mistakes and learning from those mistakes, figuring out what makes us tick, why we are the way we are, we're facing new challenges and new opportunities at every step. We're growing, learning, and becoming. Along that way, at every point, Christ is enough for you to become the one you're meant to be.

In Colossians, the writer is trying his best to help this church understand that they have a new identity in Christ. Things have changed for them, and the old rules don't apply anymore, the old ways of thinking, the old habits, don't apply anymore. They were thinking in terms of their old religious practices, their old philosophies; they were following old rules about what to eat and how to worship and where to worship and when to worship. They were thinking about others in old divisions, like "Jew or not-Jew", religious or irreligious, civilized or uncivilized, slave or free. The writer is trying to say, you're in Christ – you're new people, and this old stuff doesn't matter anymore. You're under construction, and the builder is God and the blueprint is Christ. To try to get this across, the writer says in verse nine, "Take off the old human nature with its practices and put on the new nature, which is renewed in knowledge by conforming to the image of the one who created it." He's talking about clothes here, using the language of taking off and putting on clothes. The old human nature, the old you, is like an old set of clothes that don't fit anymore; and the new nature, the "you" you're meant to be, is a new set of clothes made just for you by the one who made you.

Recently there has been some really fascinating research into something psychologists are calling "enclothed cognition." You remember the old saying, "The clothes make the man?" Well, psychologists are now proving that the "clothes make the man." A professor named Adam Galinsky led a study to determine the cognitive effects of wearing certain clothes. The question was, "how does wearing certain clothes change your psychological processes, the way you interact with the world?" In their first experiment, 58 undergrads were randomly assigned to wear either a lab coat or street clothes, and then take a test where they were asked to spot small differences between two pictures. The results were that the people who wore the white lab coats made only half as many mistakes as the ones who wore street clothes. In the second experiment, the undergrads were assigned to either wear a lab coat, a painter's coat, or have a lab coat hanging on the wall. The results were again that the ones wearing the lab coat showed the greatest improvement in attention. The clothing that they were wearing changed their psychology, changed the way they interacted with the world.

In the Old Testament, there are a couple of stories that reinforce this idea that the clothes you wear change who you are. One comes from the life of Joseph, who was the youngest son of Jacob. So Joseph was born when Jacob was old, and Jacob loved him the best of all his sons, so he made for him a long, richly decorated robe. You might call it "Joseph's Technicolor Dreamcoat" (and watch the movie this afternoon!). Joseph wore this robe around his brothers, and it made him feel loved, and safe, and important. He had these dreams that one day he would rule over his brothers, and they would bow down to him. And Joseph's brothers hated him for it. So when they got the chance, they decided to

throw Joseph into a deep well and leave him there, and tell his Father he was killed by wild animals. So they bring Joseph over to this well, and before throwing him in, what do you think they did? They stripped that robe off his back. That robe made Joseph who he was – it made him the one their Father loved the most, the one who dreamed he would rule over them.

The writer of Colossians is saying to this church, and to you and me, there's a robe that's been made for you. There is a set of clothes that belong to you, and they are the clothes of Christ. You belong to Christ. When you were baptized, you died with Christ, and were raised with Christ. The person you are becoming is hidden with Christ. You're under construction, and Christ is your new identity. So take off the old ways – they don't fit anymore – and put on this new nature, which is made just for you by the one who created you. The old habits, the old behavior, the old patterns don't fit. The rage, the boiling anger, the aggression toward other people, running others down in slander, abusive language, lies to one another. Those clothes don't fit anymore – that's not you. You've died and have been raised with Christ. You have a new identity. So stop wearing the old stuff, and put on the new clothes that fit!

Years ago, before I was married, I bought an olive green polyester suit on the clearance rack. I've since learned that things are usually on the clearance for a reason, but I didn't know that then. I wore this suit with a shirt that had small little squares, and a tie that had lots of lines going diagonally across. My brother used to say, "Patrick you're a walking optical illusion!" But I didn't know any better. Then I got married. And before long we were cleaning out closets, and Caitlin said, "That suit has to go." I said, "But I like that suit." And she said, "But that suit doesn't fit you anymore." I said, "But I can have it altered!" She said, "No. It does not fit you because it is not you. You are married to me...you do not have to look like a walking optical illusion. We will get you new clothes – but that is not you."

There are clothes that are tailor made just for you. Your heavenly Father has made clothes for you because God loves you, because you are made in his image, because God has chosen you to be his child. That is the "you," that is the "me," that is under construction. This is the person who is coming into being as Christ is being revealed in you. In your new wardrobe, on one side of the closet, are garments like compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience. They look good on you. Wear them! Over on this side of the closet, there is forgiveness, tolerance, peace, gratitude. Those are clothes made just for you. Wear them! And your go-to coat, the one you can wear to anything, is love. Over everything you put on, put on love. These clothes fit you to a tee.

In the psychology study that Professor Galinsky conducted, there was one finding that really jumped out at me. In the second experiment, some people wore the white lab coat, while others just saw it hanging on the wall. For the ones who only saw it hanging on the wall, the coat made no difference; only the ones who wore it showed an improvement. Galinsky said, "*You have to wear the coat, see it on your body and feel it on your skin for it to influence your psychological processes.*"¹ It's not enough to just know it's there, I have to put it on and wear it for it to change me. It's not enough to just know that you are a new person in Christ; it's not enough to just have it hanging on the wall so to speak. You have to put it on; you have to wear the new you, see it on your body and feel it on your skin. That's what we call growth in Christ. That is the journey of being renewed in the image of God, of becoming the person God has made you to be.

It doesn't happen all at once. There are plenty days when you look in the mirror and realize you've been wearing old clothes – old habits, old ways of thinking, old attitudes. They don't fit anymore, they don't feel good, but you've been wearing them. So you take them off, and you put on your new clothes. The clothes of compassion, kindness, gratitude, peace, forgiveness; and over all that, you put on love. And that happens every day, just like you get dressed every day, you put on these new clothes every day. And sometimes in the middle of the day, you put them on again. And day by day, as we put

¹ http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/03/science/clothes-and-self-perception.html?_r=0

on these clothes, we realize that we're becoming something new. Christ is enough for us to become the people we are meant to be. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

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October 12, 2014