

PRACTICING RESURRECTION: PART II

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

In 1994, comedian Joan Rivers revolutionized the media coverage of the Golden Globes awards. Reporting with her daughter Melissa for the E! Network, she wanted to do something new. The Senior Vice-President of E!, Gary Snegaroff, said, “They asked about what actresses were wearing because that’s what the magazines would cover after the fact, and turned it into a candid conversation on the carpet where anything could happen.” According to one report, she wanted to know what designers the celebrities had draped over them, so she asked them, “Who are you wearing?”¹

At celebrity awards events almost thirty years later, the stars’ outfits and their designers get almost as much attention as the celebrities, their movies, and their music. In response to “Who are you wearing?” the stars call out, “Jonathan Cohen . . . Prada . . . Armani . . . Christian Dior . . . Calvin Klein . . . Louis Vuitton . . . Gucci . . . Saint Laurent . . . Chanel.”

In a *New York Times* article from August 26, 1979 called “You Are What You Wear,” Nancy Beach wrote, “Clothes send out an endless variety of messages about who we are, what we feel, and which group we belong to. We create the image, send out the message, attract or repel – make the self known – through the clothes we wear and how we wear them.”² In an article from April 2021, behavioral psychologist Dr. Carolyn Mair, author of *The Psychology of Fashion*, was quoted, “Clothing is so close to us it becomes part of our identity. What we wear is a reflection of how we want to be seen, although that isn’t the same as how we are seen, because that depends on the viewer.”³

Although I spread Colossians 3:1-17 over two Sundays, the verses are all of one piece, about “The New Life in Christ.” Last Sunday, we heard Paul’s negative instructions about how to live that new life and practice resurrection: “Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). But now you must get rid of all such things – anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.” (Colossians 3:5, 8-10)

This morning we hear Paul’s positive instructions about how to live that new life in Christ and practice resurrection. Here’s how *The Message* introduces today’s epistle lesson: “So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you.” Imagine Paul calling out to you, “Who are you wearing?” and you answer “Jesus Christ!” As is his custom, Paul would probably say something like, “As you

therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord . . . If with Christ you have died to the elemental spirits of the universe . . . So if you have been raised with Christ . . . As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another. Forgive each other. Clothe yourselves with love. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. Be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Teach and admonish one another in all wisdom. With gratitude in your hearts, sing praises to God. Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (taken from Colossians 3:12-17) That's the wardrobe God has picked out for you as believers in and followers of Jesus Christ.

Hippolytus of Rome was a 2nd/3rd century A.D. theologian who left us many writings and glimpses of life in the early church. In *The Apostolic Tradition*, Hippolytus describes how new believers were baptized as the sun rose. After they had removed their old clothes, they renounced evil and were anointed with oil. The presiding bishop would pass the believers on to an elder and deacon standing by the water. Each new believer was asked three questions by the baptizer: "Do you believe in God the Father Almighty? Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and died, and rose on the third day living from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of the Father, the one coming to judge the living and the dead? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit and the Holy Church and the resurrection of the flesh?" After answering "I believe" to each question, the convert would be baptized with water each time. According to Hippolytus, "Afterward, when they have come up out of the water, they shall be anointed by the elder with the Oil of Thanksgiving, saying 'I anoint you with holy oil in the name of Jesus Christ.' Then drying themselves, they shall dress and afterwards gather in the church."⁴

According to another source, the taking off of the old clothes before baptism "spiritually represented a particular 'death' to the old self and a firm departure from sin. It was a physical reminder that they were to be born a new person in baptism and had to cast off their old ways, discarding their old clothes in order to put on the new life in Christ. Immediately after baptism the newly baptized would put on a white garment, which represented the cleansing of their sins and the purity of their soul, born anew in the font of baptism."⁵ Knowing about that baptism ritual of the early Christians helps us understand and appreciate Paul's affirmation to the Galatian Christians, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." (Galatians 3:27)

Over the last few weeks, we have heard Paul say things such as "Since you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, live in him/walk in his ways" and "So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, *act* like it." Today we hear Paul say, "So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you." In other words, our actions as Christians – especially how we treat one another in the body of Christ, the Church – should reflect the one who has clothed us in Christ. Henri Nouwen, the 20th century Dutch Catholic priest and spiritual writer, described

our new life in Christ, practicing resurrection, this way, “Being a believer means being clothed in Christ. Paul says: ‘Every one of you that has been baptised has been clothed in Christ’ (Galatians 3:27) and ‘Let your armour be the Lord Jesus Christ’ (Romans 13:14). This being ‘clothed in Christ’ is much more than wearing a cloak that covers our misery. It refers to a total transformation that allows us to say with Paul: ‘I have been crucified with Christ and yet I am alive; yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me’ (Galatians 2:20). Thus, we are the living Christ in the world. Jesus, who is God-made-flesh, continues to reveal himself in our own flesh. Indeed, true salvation is becoming Christ.”⁶

Dr. Jennifer Baumgartner is a Baltimore clinical psychologist who specializes in the treatment of mood, anxiety, substance use, and psychotic disorders, along with the psychology of dress. According to Dr. Baumgartner, "The clothing you put on your back is an incredibly accurate indicator of what you think of yourself and your life." In 2012, she published the book *You Are What You Wear: What Your Clothes Reveal About You*. Here's a description of her book as found on Amazon: "What if you could understand your appearance as a representation of your inner unresolved conflicts and then assemble a wardrobe to match the way you wish to be perceived? In this fashion guide that is like no other, Dr. Baumgartner helps readers identify the psychology behind their choices, so they can not only develop a personal style that suits their identity but also make positive changes in all areas of life."

What if we adapted Dr. Baumgartner's thesis to our Christian lives, using the apostle Paul's image of "being clothed in Christ"? Then we might write something like this: "The wardrobe that God has put on your back is an incredibly accurate indicator of who you are and what your life can be about in Christ Jesus. God has assembled a wardrobe to match who you are as people who have received Christ Jesus and been raised with Christ. The wardrobe that God has put on your back can help you develop a personal style that suits your identity as a child of God and make positive changes in all areas of your life . . . Changes such as living in the community of faith and presenting yourself to the world with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another, forgiving each other, loving each other, letting the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, being thankful, letting the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, and singing praises to God with gratitude."

Last week Dr. Dan reminded me of a song called "Two Coats," originally written by Ralph Stanley and re-arranged by Patty Loveless and her husband, Emory Gordy. It's actually a pretty good commentary on what it means to be "clothed with Christ." I'll begin with the chorus:

*I'll tell you the best thing I ever did do
I took off the old coat and put on the new*

*Two coats were before me, an old and a new
I asked my sweet master, oh, what must I do.*

*The old coat was ugly, so tattered and torn
The other a new one, had never been worn.*

*The first man was earthy and made from the ground.
We bore all his image the whole world around.*

*The next was my Savior from heaven so fair.
He bought me this new coat you now see me wear.*

*Now this coat it suits me and keeps me so warm.
It's good in the winter, it's good in the storm.*

*My Savior has dressed me in a garment so rare.
He bought me this new coat you now see me wear.*

*I'll tell you the best thing I ever did do
I took off the old coat and put on the new.*

Our Christian wardrobe is not designed by Jonathan Cohen, Prada, Armani, Christian Dior, Calvin Klein, Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Saint Laurent, or Chanel. But if somebody were to ask us, "Who are you wearing?" we can "Jesus Christ!" and then get on with practicing the resurrection life we have been given by God through Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead. As one writer puts it, "In effect Paul says, Christ has put on your flesh, therefore you should put on Christ in your flesh. And he explains that, not with a call to some mystical practices or heroic sacrifices or esoteric knowledge, but with a call to be Christ-like in our everyday living."⁷

Or, as Paul is so fond of saying, in more ways than one, "If you're going to be clothed in Christ, then act like it, live like it, walk like it. Let the wardrobe that God has put on your back make a statement about who you **really** are in Christ Jesus."

Let us pray: Gracious God, through the life and teachings of Jesus you have taught us to live as a people of love, justice, and peace. We confess that we often choose a different way, instead preferring self-righteousness, power, and dominance – even in our interactions with those around us. Call us once again to "let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts". Help us to let go of "anger, malice, slander, and abusive language." And above all, enable us to "clothe ourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony". We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

NOTES

¹From Jessica Moore, “Who Are You Wearing? Celebrity Styles on the Red Carpet,” May 2, 2022 at www.blog.hollywoodbranded.com.

²Nancy Beach, “You Are What You Wear,” August 26, 1979 at www.nytimes.com.

³Ava Whitney-Coulter, “What We Wear is a Reflection of How We Want to be Seen,” April 21, 2021 at www.mindful.org.

⁴Hippolytus of Rome, *The Apostolic Tradition* at www.stjohnsarlingtonva.org.

⁵Philip Kosoloski, “How was baptism practiced in the early Church?” April 26, 2019 at www.aleteia.org.

⁶Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2006), June 4.

⁷Stan Mest, “Colossians 3:12-17 Commentary,” December 27, 2015 at www.cepreaching.org.