



LUTHERAN CHURCH What Does It Mean to Be a Family These Days?  
Pastor Shelley Cunningham

Sunday, May 10, 2020  
*Easter Sermon Series: We're All in This Together*

**Colossians 3:12-21 NRSV**

<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.

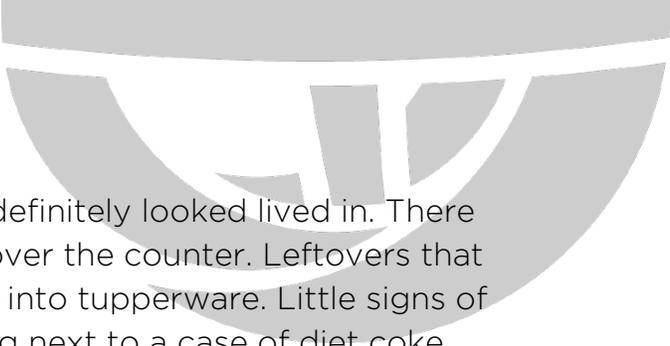
<sup>18</sup>Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. <sup>19</sup>Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.

<sup>20</sup>Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart.

There have been a lot of inspiring stories of bravery during the last couple of months.

But the one that stuck with me this week wasn't from a health care worker. It was from a fellow pastor. We're part of the same online group of Lutheran leader moms.

The brave thing she did? Post a picture with the caption, "Just for fun, look how disgusting my kitchen is!"



I don't know about disgusting – but her kitchen definitely looked lived in. There were dishes spilling out of the sink and piled all over the counter. Leftovers that hadn't quite made it out of their serving pan and into tupperware. Little signs of stress — like my favorite: an empty tub of frosting next to a case of diet coke.

Now, I certainly don't want anybody to see how 'lived in' my two young adult children and I are making my house look these days. I'm guessing you might not either. But the response from other pastor moms in the group was overwhelming. This woman had the courage to show what everyone else has been hiding. Soon everyone in the group was posting photos of the disaster areas in their own homes. And confessing how exhausted and ashamed they felt about it. And there was a lot of solidarity and absolution. And it was life-giving.

I thought about this pastor's bravery as I read, and reread, this text from Colossians. It's always been one of my favorites. Paul is straightforward and poetic as he describes the way we are called to put our faith into practice. These virtues he names – patience, compassion, humility, kindness – these virtues matter. Christians don't corner the market on them, of course, but the center of faith shows up in how we show the love and mercy of Jesus to other people. And that means being brave and authentic and for the sake of the gospel.

The thing is, it isn't always easy to live these virtues out, no matter how deep your faith. Even in the best of times, we can struggle to be patient and kind. People are weird and different and prickly. Back then the struggle was a Colossian community trying to stay away from behavior others saw as perfectly acceptable, but that didn't mesh with God's intentions. Today, that struggle comes from trying to juggle work and family all while living in this time of disappointment and anxiety that most of us have never experienced – and all while spending a LOT more time with the same people, usually in pretty close quarters.

It's certainly a challenging time to be a parent. So what does it mean to be a family these days? Tuesday I had a conversation with two Zumbro moms – Angela Cramer, whose sons are high school and college age, and Megan Beatty, who's at the other end of the age spectrum with a couple of preschoolers. I invite you to hear what they had to say about parenting in this time of pandemic.

[VIDEO of Zoom conversation available online].





What does it mean to be a parent these days? We're all making this up as we go along. We're dealing with disappointment and struggles, and with those unexpected moments of joy and moments of grace. But we're doing it together. That's what we're facing today.

I recently read a quote Pope Francis used in a sermon:

“Rivers do not drink their own water; trees do not eat their own fruit; the sun does not shine on itself and flowers do not spread their fragrance for themselves. Living for others is a rule of nature. We are all born to help each other. No matter how difficult it is ... life is good when you are happy, but much better when others are happy because of you.”

This gets right at the heart of what Paul was reminding the Colossians. We need each other – and we need God's deep well of grace as we take care of one another. Whether it's our nuclear family, or our extended family, or God's expansive family – we're all having to figure out what it means to love one another in these times. And my guess is, as we start exploring what it means to take the next steps in community, we're going to be well-served if we keep Paul's advice close at hand.

So what if you were to read this passage from Colossians every morning when you wake up this week. Mark it in your Bible and put it on your nightstand. And then, when you awake, before you put on your role of husband or wife, parent or child, colleague or neighbor, start by putting on your own identity as God's chosen one, holy and beloved. Start by being gracious with yourself. Remind yourself that you are enough. And that God is with you. As you get dressed, imagine yourself slipping over your head patience and kindness. Pull out humility and gentleness. Put them on. Do the same with compassion. Gratitude. Peace. And above all, clothe yourself with love, the love Jesus has for you and that love you are called to share with your neighbor. Jesus gives you all of these things in abundance, my friends. And if you find you're running thin, if you just aren't as patient and compassionate with those people around you as you want to be, take a deep breath, or a time out, and ask him for more. Because the love of Christ never runs out. It's here for us, in abundance. And those moments of grace will be what will sustain our families, in whatever shape they may be – today, and in the weeks to come. Amen.



