

<sup>12</sup> You are the people of God; he loved you and chose you for his own. So then, you must clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. <sup>13</sup> Be tolerant with one another and forgive one another whenever any of you has a complaint against someone else. You must forgive one another just as the Lord has forgiven you. <sup>14</sup>And to all these qualities add love, which binds all things together in perfect unity. <sup>15</sup>The peace that Christ gives is to guide you in the decisions you make; for it is to this peace that God has called you together in the one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Christ's message in all its richness must live in your hearts. Teach and instruct one another with all wisdom. Sing psalms, hymns, and sacred songs; sing to God with thanksgiving in your hearts.

Colossians 3:12-16

Good morning!

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this special day, alongside these special women.

The reading from Colossians tells us to clothe ourselves in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. And to it, add tolerance, love, and gratitude. (PAUSE) To that I say, “oh, is THAT all?” It sounds wonderful. Beautiful. Wise. But it’s also A LOT.

As humans, we fall short. I know that I fall short. Some days it’s easier than others to practice compassion, kindness, humility, patience, tolerance and gratitude. Some days, it feels almost impossible.

You may ask, as I do, “how can I foster these things in my life?” In life, as in the big picture, but more importantly, in the day-to-day. There are, of course, practices that help: positive self-talk and affirmation; literally

smiling as you answer the telephone; common courtesies such as holding a door; or checking in on a neighbor. These are all good things to do and I encourage them. That said, what we are striving for is more than simple acts of kindness.

The reading tells us to clothe ourselves in these things. Clothe ourselves. Clothing is a form of shelter, a basic need. As basic needs, these things - compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, love, and gratitude – provide the foundation for good in our lives.

These things are gifts from God. God demonstrates them to us through Grace. Every week, we hear the Assurance of Grace. It's actually my favorite part of our service, because I really need this regular reminder. We can ask God for help in demonstrating compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, love, and gratitude.

Sometimes, though, we don't *want* to do these things. They can be hard, especially if we feel wronged, or if we feel that we are the ones "always" taking the high road. When we don't want to do, show, or demonstrate these things, we can ask for the willingness to have them.

I ask daily for guidance to know God's will for me and for the ability to carry it out with patience, tolerance, kindness, and love. I ask every day because I need help every day.

Not only can we ask for these things – or at least for the willingness to have these things, we can also spend time with others who demonstrate these characteristics and actions in their lives. We are surrounded by them here. Now. There are those physically present, those engaged on the livestream, and those not here, but who have been here before. Perhaps they have passed on, perhaps they have moved away, or, like I

once did, perhaps they have grown apart, or intentionally pulled away, from this place.

I grew up attending a little Lutheran church on the prairie of Minnesota. When I came to Canton in my mid-twenties, I quickly noticed that there's not a Lutheran church to be found. I had family who attended the Church on the Park, so I decided to give this place a try.

I still remember the first time I walked in. Reverend Mike greeted me as "the elusive Lutheran." There's truth in that. We – Lutherans - don't tend to want to stick out, or rock the boat, or sit in the front pew. Except I had practice with that one. My momma was the church organist. The organ was in the front of the church, so where did we sit? The front pew. In the same order every week. Pop, me, sisters Kristen and Carey. Then mom would slip down off the organ bench to join us during the sermon.

Pat Mace wants me to be sure to mention how my mother could give us girls the "evil eye" from the organ bench, even without taking her eyes off the music as she played.

I liked this place. I liked, at my first service, how Reverend Mike passed out little musical instruments – the kind we used to march around my elementary school music classroom with – so that we could all "make a joyful noise." Just like we are told in Colossians, "sing psalms, hymns, and sacred songs."

At some point, I became a formal member of the church, but as life's layers became heavier, and more complicated, I withdrew. It was too hard. There wasn't enough time on weekends, even without going to church. My spouse wasn't particularly interested, and I was in the habit

of taking others' interests or disinterests as my own. Time passed, and I was a Christmas and Easter person, at best.

When I would occasionally darken the door, though, I was never met with judgment or question, save the judgment I passed on myself. In fact, people seemed genuinely happy to see me. In this place, from and with this congregation, I have consistently experienced compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, love, and gratitude.

Today, here I am. So what has changed? Two practical reasons are that 1) my kids are older, and 2) I have reclaimed my life as my own. But the real magic is that I was asked, and I said yes.

When Pat Mace called me and asked if I would consider being an Elder on the Session, I said something along the line of "Pat, this is Heidi. I'm a Christmas and Easter person. Do you really want me on the Session?" She reminded me of what Reverend Mike says, that "everyone has a different orbit around the church." Indeed, he has said that to me before. After some consideration, I accepted. Since that time, my engagement with our church has increased, and for that, I am grateful. Life is easier when you are a part of something bigger than yourself.

So, if you need something, ask. And if you are asked, please say yes. By participating in this church community, we receive God's Grace in abundance. Not in a tit for tat way. What I mean is that, when we believe in something bigger than ourselves, we demonstrate faith. And participation shifts our thoughts from ourselves to the whole.

This whole (PAUSE) is beautiful. We have similarities, we have differences. We each bring our strengths and our not-strengths. Each one of us is an imperfect human. And each one of us is a perfect child of God. Let us clothe ourselves, and each other, in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, love, and gratitude; and let us sing psalms, hymns, and sacred songs together.

And the people were heard to say...Amen

Let us join in singing

Hymn #7 "Mothering God, You Gave Me Birth"

Would you please stand.