

The Whole Earth Receives New Clothing

Sermon for the 5th Sunday of Easter

Sermon Text: Colossians 3:12-17



Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing

psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ 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.

A few weeks ago, Leipzig was covered with a thick fog. In the mornings, there was still enough time to examine the thin layer of ice on the plants before I went shivering back into the warm house. A little while later, the first buds burst forth from the brown branches, now the greenery has spread itself over all of Leipzig like a blanket. There are also yellow, blue, red, and white blossoms that are spreading more and more and giving the city a whole new dress and face. The first bird calls, which chirped timidly at first, have lifted their voices into a joyful crescendo. Spring has come! Everything is happy! We are happy too. And that's why we have chosen a special Sunday to sing and make music like the birds at the top of their lungs. We do all of this to praise God for His wonderful deeds. How wonderful it is that we may be called God's children! How wonderful it is that we also can now sing again with loud voices. We may sing! And not just one person should sing – the entire congregation may sing along! And we may do that in many languages, even in many different styles because we can no longer hide what is within us. We want to shout it out. We want to be joyful! Just as Spring cast out the dark clouds and the green buds and colorful blossoms expelled the brown plants, we also cast out evil, sadness, hate, jealousy, and war!

In the Bible verses stated above, Paul talks like that about the new life in Christ. It is exactly like when we pick out new clothing in Spring to greet the Spring. We try the newest fashions and then want to show them off on the streets. Likewise, we look into God's store and ask ourselves, what should I put on as a Christian? It is about active action! It's about a "taking off" and a "putting on" - both are action words. That means that it's about our life in the here and now. What do I want to do as a Christian? And what does it mean that I am a Christian? What doesn't belong to my Christian life, that I must lay aside? And what is so important that I must absolutely put on these pieces of clothing. Most of you come from countries where religion is an integral part of the government and is the culture. All this is also expressed in clothing, the women especially have certain outfits that identify them as Muslims. But there is also a certain outfit and behavior for men. Through fasting and times of prayer, people show their identity as a Muslim. It's not like that in Germany. Religion is thought of as something private in

Germany. Everyone should decide for themselves what they do and how they should dress themselves and if they should fast or not. This is a big problem for Muslims because how can they raise their children to be true Muslims when no one else lives that way or when the people here think Muslim clothing is weird or even despise it? And how is it for us Christians? Can we live out our faith freely? And what clothes are there for Christians? Normally, there is no Christian church that forces their members to wear certain clothing. And yet, there is Christian clothing and Paul talks about it. He says that we should take off the old clothing and put on new Christian clothes. I would like to compare what the new Christian clothes can mean to the clothing of a hedgehog. Hedgehogs are quite friendly animals and they like to live in the company of other hedgehogs too. But hedgehogs must naturally always maintain a certain distance to other hedgehogs because if they didn't, they would hurt each other with their quills. Most people see themselves just like a hedgehog. You give your neighbor something good, you tolerate them too, you will even donate a little money for refugees or for people in emergency situations. But your love towards your neighbor has a limit! And the limit is when your neighbor comes too close to you. So the following sentences come up: "If my neighbor gets too close to me, he could demand all my time! Oh – the neighbor comes too close to me and I would have to share his problems with him! Oh – I would have to share my problems with others! Oh no, my private life is none of their business! That would be unbearable and we would constantly poke each other with our many mistakes and problems and annoy each other!" Christian clothing is different than the clothing of a hedgehog. We can put aside all the quills and mistakes that we carry around with us. We can discard them and put on new clothes, the clothes that Christ gave us. And the new clothing in Christ means infinite love! Christ truly gave of Himself without holding anything back. When Christ came to us, He didn't say: I'm going to the people but I will only love them all from a distance. Jesus didn't say: "Oh dear, I would rather not be part of Joseph and Mary's family, they are so poor. And why should I trade my kingdom in heaven for such poverty? Let me at least be the child of a rich person." No, Christ didn't say that. His love was without limits and without quills. He didn't just come to Mary and Joseph, but also to many other people. He wasn't ashamed to touch the dirty lepers. Likewise, He wasn't ashamed of being dirtied by other people. He even let Himself be mocked and hung on a cross. Jesus had limitless love. And it is this love that overcame the world of hate and darkness. Christ conquered death. Christ conquered evil. Christ also overcame all the quills upon which we also hurt ourselves. We may turn from the battlefield of broken human relationships and turn to Christ. We may love! According to the words of Paul, we all may take off and put aside what belongs to Satan. All the works that belong to Satan, no longer belong to us – the lies, the broken relationships, and the hurts that we have done to each other, we now lay aside and we put new clothing on. The new clothes consist of light, peace, and love for others. With this, Paul leads us to the source of Christian life – Baptism. In Baptism, Christ clothed us with new Christian clothing. In Baptism, we are born again. That is, we are not actually the ones who have to do anything in Baptism. It is Christ who is entirely active. HE gives us all that He did for us on the cross and He draws us to Him. When we see the sprouts of the beautiful plants and flowers in Spring, we know that the plants and flowers all emerge from seeds. The earth can do nothing without seeds, it must remain fallow. But the seed connects itself so closely to the earth that the earth itself is closely connected with the flowers and people think that it is the earth that looks so pretty. The seed of the flowers is so closely connected to the earth that it is a part of the earth. It laid itself in the earth and only in this way can the earth bring forth buds, branches, and fruits. Jesus has likewise connected Himself to us. It is His Word that has settled itself deep in our hearts and from there, God's Word connects completely with my person and I can bring forth the qualities of my Lord Jesus Christ as fruit. In doing so, I amazingly discover that my

brothers and sisters carry the exact same Christ in their hearts. I can rejoice over this! Naturally, I also discover faults in my brothers and sisters. I also discover faults in myself. And that's why I don't rely on myself and my strength, instead I rely on Christ and daily go to Christ and ask for forgiveness and for new strength for the next day. I encounter this same Christ in worship when I hear God's Word here, when I sing songs, when I pray, and when I receive Holy Communion. Many people say, why do you go to church? You can do everything online! And worship is senseless because it is always the same. People who talk like this remind me of a cold Winter morning that I experienced a few weeks ago. What I could see and feel was just the bitter cold and the brown Winter. What I didn't know was that even then, the seeds under the earth sprouted and grew. They only waited for the first rays of sun. It is similar for us Christians. We are nothing but earth. But something sprouts and blooms within us already. Within us is none other than Jesus Christ Himself. Amen.