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First Church of Christ in Longmeadow UCC
First Sunday after Christmas
December 31, 2006

Colossians 3.12-17
Luke 2.41-52

A New Wardrobe

“Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” – Colossians 3.14

I want to start out this morning with a question. Raise your hand if you are wearing something new this morning—something that you received as a Christmas gift? Yes, I thought there'd be a few hands up. When we're *kids* we don't get too excited about getting clothing for Christmas, but most of us adults like it a lot. (I got a nice micro fleece vest, but I didn't think it would work well underneath my robe. I have been wearing it almost every day, however!)

Clothing makes a great Christmas gift because it is practical, but also personal. Someone takes the time to pick out something that fits your own individual style. It gives you something to cover your body and keep you warm, but it does more than that. A new wardrobe can also give lift to your spirits and make you feel more comfortable and confident. Plus, as an added bonus, when you wear a piece of clothing that you received as a gift, you can think fond thoughts of the person who gave it to you.

We haven't had any snow yet this year, but when we do get some we'll need another wardrobe for that. I always resist getting out my boots and such (I don't really like winter all that much), but at some point I always have to concede that penny loafers aren't going to cut it anymore. Most of us needed to modify our wardrobe to prepare for the changing weather.

In the letter to the Colossians, the Bible uses a clothing metaphor to help us understand our Christian faith. As people of faith, we are called to acquire a new wardrobe of virtues:

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. 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. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

(Colossians 3.12-14)

This is a great passage for the Sunday after Christmas. We're already tuned-in to our physical wardrobes. Now we can use similar logic to understand our spiritual wardrobes.

Like our new Christmas clothing, the virtues listed in this letter—compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience—these things come to us as a gift. In Jesus Christ we are not simply given a list of behavioral demands. We are given a new core for our being: love.

Inviting Christ to be born into our hearts can actually change who we are and how we live. It really is a gift.

Now, maybe it is a fancier gift than we've ever been given before. Sometimes when we receive a really nice jacket or sweater under the Christmas tree, we have to learn some new things about maintaining the gift. We might need to hand wash delicate garments or get a special brush or take things to the dry cleaners. The clothing itself is a gift and requires no work to obtain. But we may need to change our habits to take proper *care* of the gift. In the same way, when Jesus gives us a new heart of love, it is a done deal. We have it. It is ours. We don't have to earn it or make an effort to receive it. But we do need to pay attention to it, to take care of it, to honor it. And, as we all know, that can be challenging. But it is possible, and, over time, we can get better and better at taking care of the new wardrobe we have been given.

As we said before, a good gift reminds us fondly of the giver. And so it is with our new Christian wardrobe of compassion and kindness. When we live in a way that is loving and kind,

we are reminded of God's great kindness to us in the Christ child whose birth we celebrate this season. By showing kindness to our brothers and sisters here on earth, we can receive a beautiful reminder of the love of our heavenly parent. In this way, our spiritual gifts continue to enrich and expand our lives—even after we've been using them for years and years.

So, our new wardrobe of love is like a wonderful present that we receive at Christmas. But it is also like that wardrobe that we pull out of the closet to get ready for winter. As Christians, we believe that God's Kingdom was initiated in Jesus Christ and will someday be brought to a glorious consummation at the close of history. In our lives here in this world, we are always living in expectation of something better. We look forward to the day when God's perfect love and God's exacting justice will—once and for all—be established and visible to everyone.

In anticipation of this coming Kingdom, we need a wardrobe. It is the same wardrobe we've already talked about. Even though God's Kingdom is a future promise, we can get ready for it now. Just like we don't wait until the snow is six feet high to get out our boots, neither do we wait until God's Kingdom is complete before we start dressing like Kingdom citizens. By clothing ourselves with love now, we can begin to prepare for the new reality that God is bringing into being.

New Year's Eve isn't a bad day to consider what sort of spiritual wardrobe we are going to adopt for the coming year. Our text for today is a great passage for a time of new beginnings. As we all prepare to begin a new calendar year tomorrow, we do well to consider what sort of spiritual clothing we want to wear.

In Jesus Christ, we've been given some wonderful gifts. From Holy Scripture, we've also received a reliable forecast of changing spiritual conditions. Let us now use and honor our gifts, as we prepare for the new season soon to be unveiled.