

## The Importance of Character

Sermon

September 3, 2017

Colossians 3:12-14

*“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.”*

Pray with me.

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O God our strength and our redeemer. Amen.*

This is Labor Day weekend.

The weekend of football season is starting, picnics with family and friends, three-day weekends, and the last chance to wear white.

The Labor Day holiday started in 1894 for the purpose of celebrating the American men and women in the work force and the contributions they make in the community.

It is a day to recognize the way we use our skills and gifts to help others in the community – doctors, nurses, lawyers, teachers, bankers, executives, engineers, administrative assistants – just to name a few.

We work together to make our community a better place to live and use our occupations to help one another out.

When I was in seminary a professor of mine told the class, *“Your jobs in ministry may be Pastors or Christian Educators, but don’t let your job get in the way of your ministry.”*

He wanted us to remember that whatever we do in the church - is just an avenue to help and care for others.

The same is true in the work force.

Our jobs shouldn’t get in the way of doing ministry.

Whatever we do can be used to help and care for others in the community and even in the nation.

**Whatever we do, we should do at the best of our ability - with integrity and character.**

**So, what does character mean?**

**It means doing what is right – even at a moment’s notice and even when no one is watching.**

**It means making right choices and decision based on what is best, instead of selfish gain or selfish motive.**

**It means that whatever we do – work or play, we do at the best of our ability.**

**So, college football started yesterday.**

**Yeah, I know.**

**You were thinking that since Dr. Gardner is gone this week, you weren’t going to hear a sermon with sports in it.**

**But, college football started yesterday. Did I mention that?**

**Scott and I have season tickets to the K-state games.**

**One of the people I think about when I think of character is Coach Bill Snyder.**

**The other coach that falls into this category is Bill Self, but this is football season.**

**We can talk about Self in a few months.**

**Snyder (for those of you who don’t know) is the Head Football Coach for Kansas State University.**

**When he started at K-state in 1989, the football team was the worst in NCAA history.**

**They hadn’t won a game in three years.**

**The players told Snyder that they didn’t go out with their friends to Aggieville after a game, and that they no longer wore their letter jackets.**

**They didn’t go to class on Monday and many didn’t even go on Tuesday.**

**Why? They were too embarrassed to go.**

**These players had lost their sense of self- worth and dignity.**

**They truly felt like losers.**

**It showed in the way they talked, the way they carried themselves and in their grades.**

Snyder knew it would take hard work, time and self- discipline, but he knew he turn these players into winners.

He knew the players cared. They just needed someone to help them change their attitude – from feeling like losers to winners - Someone that cared about them and pushed them to do their very best.

One of the mottos that he started sharing with his players is this – which I love:

*“Do what you’re supposed to do. Do it right, and do it that way every time.”*

*“Everything starts off the field. Treat people well, go to class, do what’s assigned. If you strive for that, all the other stuff isn’t that complicated. And eventually, that standard you hold yourself to will carry over onto the football field.”*

They started the season off by losing their first three games.

The fourth game was at home.

They were actually ahead and about to beat North Texas, but with 1:37 to go - North Texas scored and took the lead.

The stadium grew silent, but the team wasn’t ready to give up.

(Why is that? I think a big part of it was Snyder. In the short time, he had been coaching them, they no longer saw themselves as losers and they were not about to give up.)

With four seconds left on the clock, K-State, made a pass, got a touch- down and won the game.

The team and the fans went crazy. The whole stadium was cheering, jumping up and down. People were even running onto the field.

They had not won a game in three years.

Snyder said, *“It was like Christmas had come to Manhattan three months early.”*

Each year after that season, the team got just a little bit better.

They won their first bowl game ever in 1993, and then the Big 12 Conference championship 10 years later.

**Bill Snyder is truly a man of character.**

**You see it in the way he coaches and in the way, he lives his life.**

**He truly believes that whatever we do, we should do at the best of our ability - with integrity and character.**

**He not only believes that, but he lives it and has been teaching it to his football players for over 24 years.**

**Character means doing what is right – even at a moment’s notice and even when no one is watching.**

**It means right choices and decision based on what is best, instead of selfish gain or selfish motive.**

**It means that whatever we do – work or play, we do at the best of our ability.**

**The Apostle Paul was a tent maker.**

**He learned this skill and trade from his father in Tarsus and he used his occupation as part of his ministry.**

**He worked as a tent maker in many of the places he traveled to support himself, but also to support the community he was visiting.**

**He did not let his job get in the way of doing ministry, instead he saw his job as his ministry to the various communities he visited.**

**He didn’t use the money he made for selfish gain or motive, he used the money he earned to help the poor and needy, to help those in the community and to help the churches he started.**

**People also gave Paul money to take back to people in need.**

**Paul was a man of character.**

**Over the course of his missionary journeys, Paul traveled over 10,000 miles to various cities and towns to share the message of Christ to others.**

**10,000 miles – Wow!**

**He traveled by boat, by foot - Rugged terrain, easy terrain, various weather conditions.**

**He was beaten, stoned, arrested, but that never stopped him from sharing his faith with others.**

**In the book of Acts, we hear that Paul was in the town of Lystra.**

While he was there, people that opposed him from Iconium and Antioch came and won over the crowds.

Hear this from Acts 14:

*“Then they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But when the disciples surrounded him, he got up and went into the city. The next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.”*

Paul never gave up.

Even though the people stoned him and left him for dead, he still got up and went back into the city to share his faith with others.

Paul wanted people from all over to know about the love and grace of Jesus Christ.

Even from prison, he still wrote letters of encouragement and faith to the churches he started.

The letter he wrote from prison to the church in Colossae, we know as the book of Colossians.

In chapter 3, Paul wanted to help the church understand the importance of Christian character. Verses 12-14 says:

*“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.”*

This sounds a little bit like part of the letter Paul wrote to the people in Corinth. I Corinthians 13 says:

*“Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. <sup>7</sup> It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.”*

These are great verses and we have heard these verses many times at weddings.

However, Paul wrote these so churches can understand the importance of

character.

True character is showing patience, compassion, kindness and humility to others.

It is about being there for others, forgiving others, always showing love to others.

Character is doing what is right – even at a moment’s notice and even when no one is watching.

It is making right choices and decision based on what is best, instead of selfish gain or selfish motive.

It means that whatever we do – work or play, we do at the best of our ability.

Or in the words of Bill Snyder:

*“... Treat people well, go to class (or work), do what’s assigned. If you strive for that, all the other stuff isn’t that complicated. And eventually, that standard you hold yourself to will carry over onto the football field.”*

...Or carry onto the other things you do in life.

Hurricane Harvey has really been on my mind this week as I know it has been to everyone else.

The rain and flooding has been horrible and devastating.

My family lived in Texas for 13 years and two of my kids were born there.

I took seminary classes in Houston and cannot wrap my mind around this city (4<sup>th</sup> biggest city in the nation) being flooded.

So many people are displaced. Homes and businesses are destroyed.

30 to 40,000 homes have been damaged.

While we have been hearing about the flooding in Texas, there has also been flooding and devastation in India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sierra Leone.

**1200 people have been killed and millions have been left homeless by the flooding.**

**As one individual, it is easy to feel helpless, but it also in times like this where we see the true character of people.**

**We have seen many stories already of people jumping in and helping out in Houston.**

**People of various economic status, of various ethnic backgrounds and various occupations are helping each other out.**

**Why? Because of character - They know deep down, it is the right thing to do.**

**People have taken their boats and jet skis to save people - Centers, churches, and offices that have provided spaces for people to go.**

**Faith communities and businesses all over are jumping in to help.**

**There is a furniture store owner that turned the furniture store into a shelter for people to stay.**

**Now you and I both know this business will no longer be able to sell their furniture as new.**

**The owner will lose profit and probably still owes money on the furniture that is in the store.**

**But during this crisis situation, this store owner is showing character.**

**Character is doing what is right – even at a moment's notice and even when no one is watching.**

**It is making right choices and decision based on what is best, instead of selfish gain or selfish motive.**

**It means that whatever we do – work or play, we do at the best of our ability.**

**We are doing an emergency fund today to the United Methodist Committee on Relief to help the people affected by the flood.**

We know that 100 percent of what is given to UMCOR will go directly to helping those in need.

We are also making and collecting cleaning buckets until September 10.

We will take all the buckets that are collected to our Great Plains United Methodist Conference office.

Then our Disaster and Response Team will take them down to Texas and Louisiana.

Places like Texas, Louisiana, and India are going to need our help for quite a while.

These are only a few things that we can do right now, but I know we are all willing to help as much as we can.

Because that is who we are as Christian and as people with integrity and character.

We are to use our skills and gifts to help others in the community and nation – to love and care for others to the best of our ability.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 says,

*“Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant<sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;<sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.<sup>7</sup> It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.”*

I want you to take a moment and I it out loud together, but this time we are going to replace the words love and it in the passage with our name.

For instance, if your name is Karen you would say, “Karen is patient. Karen is kind.....”

Ready?

*“Name is patient; Name is kind; Name is not envious or boastful or arrogant<sup>5</sup> or rude. Name does not insist on her/his own way; Name is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> Name does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. <sup>7</sup> Name bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Name never ends.”*

Amen.