

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus: 2Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*3Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. 5He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace 8that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight 9he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, 10as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 11In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, 12so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. 13In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; 14this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.*

I never used to wear a clerical collar except on Sundays, or days of funerals or weddings. Serving in small towns where everyone knew me to be the Lutheran pastor, advertising that was one seemed redundant.

But in the time that I have served here, I have found it helpful to wear a collar some of the time. Visiting in hospitals where I am not known, especially when my visit is to the intensive care unit, I find that nurses seem more tolerant of my presence if my appearance announces my profession. In the last few years I have had more experience wearing my collar out in public.

Some things I have noticed as I have done so: I get called "Father - not just by my children, but by all sorts of folks. "Hello Father " – "nice day we're having Father" – "after you, Father." They think I'm a priest. I never explain that I am not.

A related phenomenon is this: Many people speak to me. Sometimes when I forget I'm wearing the collar I think to myself, "Boy you must seem friendly today - must be the cheery disposition, the winning smile. Then suddenly I realize it's the little white tab attached to my shirt.

There is one more type of experience I have as I wear a collar: I'll be driving in my usual aggressive manner, ready to crowd tight in line to keep the car ahead from sneaking in

when I will think about what I am wearing. I will be walking down the sidewalk paying absolutely no attention to anyone I pass, when I will realize I am wearing a collar. I will be in a store, giving the cashier no more thought than I would a vending machine, when I realize I am wearing a collar. Christ and his church are being seen by what I do in this moment, I think. I am not just Lynn Schlessman in these moments, I am Lynn Schlessman, a Christian.

What if we all had collars to remind us of that? “You are not your own,” we read in 1 Corinthians, “you were bought with a price, so glorify God in your body.”

Or as we read in our second lesson for today: *“We who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory.”*

So quickly I forget. I begin to live as if my life is mine alone, to be ruled only by my desire in every moment - my hurry, my anger, my need, my highest God. How easy to restrict Christ to this time of the week, and this place, so that he never goes with us into K Mart or out on the highway. How easy to act as if the sign of the cross made on our foreheads in baptism means nothing for how we deal with the people we encounter through the day, family, friend, co-worker, stranger.

Our gospel for today tells of Jesus sending out his disciples to extend his work in the world: “He called to him the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff, no bread, no bag, no money in their belts, So they went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them.”

Into the world to carry on Jesus work, that was their call. While you may not be casting out demons, and anointing with oil those who are sick, this call is yours also. In the world you carry on Jesus work.

Jesus met people where they were. Children he took time to hold and to bless. He noticed, he stopped, he spoke, he was available, not distracted or too busy.

Through our offerings here we seek to carry on Jesus work, through the larger church we feed the hungry and provide those who visit the sick and clothe the naked and visit those in prison. But Jesus work of touching lives, of listening, of caring one by one belongs to each of you. In Christ you are free to do that. Free to give your time and your attention to others, asking nothing in return. In Christ you are free to treat each person as a person, worthy of a

smile, and courtesy and interest. In Christ you are free to let go of your rights, to let others step on you and to turn the other cheek. In Christ you have that freedom, and that power.

In our second lesson we read: *For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

Now that is complicated sounding but simply put it says that God's final will is to unite all things in Jesus Christ.

He is doing it through Jesus giving himself in love. Not through laws or rules, but through loving, even those who would destroy him, forgiving even those who nailed him to the cross. Dying for sinners rather than punishing them, this is God's way. God, turning the other cheek in Jesus Christ in order to finally unite all things in him. Not his rights, his needs, his hungers ruled Jesus but his love, even to death.

Now Jesus continues to give himself through you, his body. Not your rights, your needs, your hungers but Christ's love rules in you. As you give yourself in love more and more will the world become united in Christ and God's will will be done.

Go into the world, then people of God, and love as you have been loved. Listen as your Lord listens to you, give as your Lord has given for you, take time as your Lord as taken time for you. And the world will belong more to God and less to his enemies.