

## Colossians 3:12-17 Practising Resurrection

Last week, Chris challenged us to “slay the beast.” I don’t know about you, but sometimes the harder I have tried to “slay the beast” the more intensely it raises its head. So this morning’s sermon is for those who try to put to death the beast only for it to re-emerge with vengeance. What I want to explore this morning is how we break that cycle. As I reflected on Chris’ sermon, I came away thinking how much the “beast” actually feeds on my own woundedness. I have realised that to be able to put to death certain ways of relating that are self rather than other focussed, I must tend to my own woundedness. So that’s where we are going this morning.

But first I want to make a couple of important observations from the wider passage. **The first is that Paul here, when he says, put away this and that, is not presenting a moral framework of rules and regulations.** That would completely undo the previous chapter of Colossians, where he completely dismantles the notion that there is any external practice, ritual or identity that qualifies or disqualifies us. It is not mere private morality or purity but an ethic of right relationship. When we look at what Paul has told us to put to death and what to put on, it is all relational. The things that we are to put to death are ways of relating to others that is in the first category self-gratifying, the second is self-aggrandisement. The first list canvases the way we treat other people and things as objects to meet our own desires, and the second is the anger and violence we use when those desires are not met.

Likewise, the list of virtues Paul exhorts us to put on like a garment, are all relational. Compassion. Kindness. Humility. Meekness. Patience. Bearing one another. Forgiving. All assume an ‘other.’ So, it’s not a moral code, but a relational ethic being presented here. The Kingdom of heaven is in your midst, and only exists in the relational the space between us. Paul is presenting two opposing ways of relating to others. One way self-gratifying and self-aggrandizing and a way which is other minded thinking of the other fellow first as my granddad used to say.

**Secondly, woven throughout this passage is a story we are being located in.** This not an abstract relational ethic. It is rooted in the story of Jesus that we are called to participate in and be formed by. The story of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension. By virtue of our baptism, we have been buried with Christ. We have died, and we have been raised with him. God has forgiven our trespasses and record of debt. Keesmaat and Walsh write, “This is not a narrative that imposes a series of absolutes to oppress us... this is a story of restored relationships, a love story that calls forth an alternative community characterised by compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, love, peace, gratitude and wisdom. This is a story of creational restoration, a renewal to full humanness, in the image of the Creator.”

Here's how this passage has related to my life recently in the context of my relationship with Buzzy, and yes this has all been okayed by her. In the context of our relationship, I was trying to slay to beast. To die to

myself. To put off my old self. But the harder I tried to slay the beast, the more aggressively and pervasively it reared its head up in new and surprising ways. I'd try putting on the "new clothes" in the morning, only to be stinking of the beast by evening. I so desperately wanted to die to myself. This is the Christian thing to do right? This is this is how we live Christian marriages we die to ourselves we ignore our needs and we put the other person first and we serve the other.

And so I would ignore my woundedness brushing them to the side. But they would still be there simmering and lingering. And I would be trying to be compassionate, kind, gentle. And the more I tried, the more I grit my teeth and clench my fists, the louder the ego voice inside of me was saying yeah, but what about what about your wants and needs? What are you getting in the relationship? The more I was simmering internally, the more this was emanating out into the relationship. Buzzy said to me one day, you're either 0 or 100 and I don't know what Jeremy I am going to get. We were caught in this dynamic. I was longing for deeper levels of connection and buzzy was feeling distant and cold to me. And so I was responding, sometimes consciously, sometimes subconsciously by being moody, grumpy, irritable, angry, frustrated all of the things that Paul says put to death. Of course Buzzy responds by going further into her shell.

So, two weeks ago we did this marriage therapy weekend called *Getting the love you want* workshop. Two full days. About half of the first day was just about exploring our family of origins. The hurts the wounds. The most painful memories, the good memories, what we liked about our relationships with our parents and what we struggled with. We begin to start making the connections between the way we act and relate to one another and how it actually ties to the to the wounds that we carry from our family of origin. I guess this is basic therapy stuff but I never really thought of applying it to our relationship. We learnt that we're not just responding to each other. We're responding to our deepest wounds. When buzzy drew into her shell I wasn't just responding to her drawing into her shell I was responding to my sense of abandonment as a child. And when Buzzy responds to my prickliness, my frustration. She's not just responding to me and my emotions. She's responding to her own childhood trauma.

Yes, as Chris said, at times we need to be ruthless and slay the beast. But one thing I want to invite you to consider and one thing that has really revolutionized our marriage is to consider **what are the wounds that are feeding the beast? What are the wounds that are feeding and strengthening the beast** because if you're like me and you are stuck in vicious cycles of trying to slay the beast and having the beast raise its head we need to know what are the wounds that are sustaining the beast? What is feeding your beast? What are the wounds that need to be tended to in your life?

Now I'm aware I'm talking about the context of our marriage. But aren't these the dynamics that can work their way out in all of our closest relationships? Now Paul didn't have the psychological knowledge that we have on trauma and its effects in the rest of our lives. However, I think he intuitively here some of the lessons

that have turned our relationship around and broke the vicious cycle that I was stuck in. I see aspects of them here and so let us turn now to our passage and see what wisdom might be gained.

The first thing Paul says is **put on then as God's Chosen Ones, holy and beloved.** Paul's just challenged them to slay the beast. These are death dealing practices that you need to put to death which are hurting you and your relationships. You need to put to death ways of treating others that is self-gratifying and self-aggrandising. Then what does he say? He calls them: God's Chosen Ones, holy, beloved. He affirms them. He says, before I'm going to tell you what virtues you need to put on. I just want to affirm your identity. I'm going to affirm that you are chosen holy and beloved. Isn't that beautiful? This isn't pull up your bootstraps to earn favour. This is Grace. This is how to walk and lean into the unforced rhythms of grace. This was one of the things this is the very first thing that we did in the course. And also at the beginning and end of every conversation. We said an affirmation to each other. Something that you like about your partner. And then at the end of every conversation, even the tricky conversations, we had to say "something I liked about you in this conversation was..." Paul was intuiting here the need and the importance of affirming one another. If we're going to see any sorts of change in our habits. In slaying the beast.

Put on then God's Chosen Ones holy and beloved, **compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.** It's interesting that the metaphor is clothing oneself, these are external things that we put on, they are not something that we somehow outwork within ourselves from the depths of our heart, that we can somehow conjure up these attributes. When I came to title this talk, I titled it practicing resurrection because it's an invitation here to just try to just put things on. To be intentional and say, today I'm going to choose to be compassionate or kind. And there's another intuitive wisdom here from Paul. That sometimes we do not feel like being kind and compassionate. And like I was trying to do, we can't just conjure it up magically from within. We can't just grit our teeth and clench our fists and hope that the old self dies and the new one arises. It is something that we practice putting on. See how it fits. We learnt on our course how to ask in specific ways for the other to change behaviours so they are living more into the new self. For example, in one of our conversations, Buzzy asked if I could for two weeks, send her a message each day saying something I appreciated about her. I started out really strong but got a bit patchy towards the end. What would it look like to practice putting on these new attributes with specific, measurable, achievable and time bound goals? Perhaps invite someone else into that process if you are brave enough to ask them what part of the wardrobe you might need to practice putting on.

**And above all, these put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony.** I find it interesting that on either side of "above all put on love", there are three injunctions to forgive and then after Paul has three ways of saying Be thankful. It's almost as if forgiveness and thankfulness are the right hand and the left hand of love. Everything is held together, woven together by love. Again, something that we put on we practice and of course, at times the beast will raise its head. What do we do with that?

Well, firstly, we need to **forgive**, because in the in the grist of life, the beast will raise its head, we each will act out of our woundedness in self-gratifying and self-aggrandising ways. And so we need to be forgiving one another. Notice the “ing.” But we also need to forgive ourselves for we have been forgiven. We need to forgive our parents or caregivers, and when we find ourselves relating to one another out of our wounds, to recognise that dynamic saying, I’m not just responding to you right now I’m responding to my hurts. We need to go back and examine those wounds and forgive, forgive, forgive. Now, I am aware that forgiveness is a journey, we all have different things in our relationships to forgive. Some unbelievably painful. What I have particularly in mind here is those little things that rub against our woundedness, recognising that each other’s beasts are emerging out of their own woundedness.

And lastly, three repetitions, exhortation to be **thankful**. Be thankful. With thankfulness in your hearts. Whatever you do in Word and deed, do it giving thanks. Thanksgiving and gratitude is the final intuitive key of how we break the cycle. Intentional acts of thanksgiving is what helps us subvert the beast and allows us to put the other person first. One of the most powerful exercises of the weekend that Buzzy and I was called **flooding**. We spent some time writing all of the things we liked about each other under four different categories. And then we took turns sitting in a chair and walking around each other. And worked our way through our list. I like this about you. I like this about you. I like this about you. I love that you do this. I love that you do this. I enjoy when this and it just broke away so much of the baggage that had been built up over time. It literally felt like hitting a reset button on our marriage through a gratuitous act of Thanksgiving. Paul seems to be intuiting the need for flooding our lives with one another with gratitude. How might gratuitous thanksgiving play a role in slaying the beast without having to face it head on?

I’m aware that I have taken a narrow slice this morning by applying this to my relationship with Buzzy. But this is where this text has connected with my life especially over the last two weeks. Christ is all and in all. Now it’s only been two weeks and we’re that the journey will be like this but I really feel like I’ve broken the back of the Beast by allowing myself to acknowledge what were my needs. I hope you can identify in your own life perhaps the wounds that might be feeding the beast.

- Is there a relationship in which you feel unable to slay the beast?
- Can you identify the wounds that might trigger the beast?
- What would it look like to begin to affirm the other in this relationship? To forgive and express gratitude for the other?
- What are some specific, measureable and time bound ways you can practice resurrection and “put on” compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, love, and thankfulness into this relationship?