

**Sermon Title:** “Clothe Yourselves with Love”

**Text:** Colossians 3:12-17

**Preached At:** Lethbridge Mennonite Church

**By:** Ryan Dueck

**Date:** December 30, 2012/1<sup>st</sup> Sunday After Christmas

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We have arrived at the last Sunday of 2012.

Christmas festivities are winding down, family and friends are heading back home.

One of our family’s Christmas traditions is to share our diseases with one another each year, so I have spend a good chunk of this week shivering in bed with a pounding headache and clogged sinuses.

This is my caveat before today’s sermon ☺. I have not had the usual time for preparation that I am used to. If the sermon is incoherent, you can blame it on the medication ☺.

For me, as for many, the end of the year is a natural opportunity to reflect on the year gone by, to reassess, reevaluate, and to ask big questions.

Every year about this time—between the frenetic activity of Christmas and the looming New Year—I start to ask myself, “Well, another Christmas is on the way out... What was *that* all about?” All of the extra parties, all of our Advent worship services which focused on the God who comes like a flood to unsettle and bring mercy, all of the gatherings, and songs, etc., etc.

What’s the point of it all? What does it *mean* as we head out into 2013?

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I cracked open a few books during my convalescence this week ☺. One of these was called *Why Does the World Exist?* by Jim Holt. It is a whirlwind tour through the worlds of cosmology and philosophy and science, and seeks to answer (or at least shed some light on) the age-old question of why there is something rather than nothing.

Why does the world go to all the trouble of existing? Is there a *reason*? Does the universe have some kind of a *goal* in coming into being? Is our world just the random product of time plus chance? How could we find out answers to such questions? I’m looking forward to seeing what Mr. Holt uncovers on his “existential detective story.”

But it’s interesting to me what he dismisses right from the start.

Here’s what he says only nine pages in:

Abstract ideas cannot figure in our usual causal explanations. It would be nonsense to say, for example, that Goodness “caused” the Big Bang.<sup>1</sup>

I stopped short when I read this passage. It would be *nonsense*, the author says, to entertain the idea that something like goodness and, we may assume, other things like beauty or love, could factor into our conception of why the world exists.

Interesting.

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The story of Christmas is not a work of cosmology or of philosophy. It is certainly not anything like a scientific account of the origins and nature and meaning of the world.

But I think that in a way, the story of Christmas is a kind of answer to the question of why the universe “goes to all the trouble of existing.”

The story of Christmas says that God comes to earth in the person of Jesus. The very creator God who spoke life into existence, comes to earth at a specific time and in a specific place... He is welcomed by fearful shepherds and curious wise men and murderous tyrants and suspicious religious elites, and he announces *good news*.

He says that the kingdom of God has come near... that he has come to proclaim good news to the poor... that the sum total of *all* the law is *love*—love of God and neighbour... that he has come because “God so *loved* the world (John 3:16)... that God is somehow putting things back together through him.

### **And why?**

Because our God—Father, Son, and Spirit—is a relational God and because he seeks relationship with the human beings he has created in his image.

Like a father and his adopted children... Like a shepherd and his sheep... Like a lover and the beloved... Like a king and his subjects... Like a brother and his siblings... Like a master who is a slave or a slave who is a master... The Bible stretches and strains with metaphors for how God relates to human beings, but behind each one is love.

Apparently, God made a world because love is who God is and because God wanted to share this love with human beings.

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Of course, many people think that this story is absurd. The reason that the vast galaxies, constellations exist, etc. is to bring about *love*? It is surely the height of arrogance to insist that love is the reason for our universe’s existence—that the reason for black

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Holt, *Why Does the World Exist: An Existential Detective Story* (London: Profile, 2012), 9.

holes and quarks and stars and planets and moons and rivers and lakes and mountains and cities and oceans and deserts has something to do with *love*.

That's not a *reason*. That's just a bunch of mushy religious nonsense.

Right?

Yet is this not what is implied by the incarnation of Jesus Christ? The God of the Universe, becoming a little baby born in a barn, to show us how to live, to rescue us from death and destruction, to pay for our sin, to open the door to new life?

Does not the story of Christmas imply that goodness and love really *are* the answer to the question of why the world exists?

Does not the astonishing claim that the very God who declared of his creation, "it is good" way back in Genesis 1 took on human flesh and said that he did so out of love for his creation (John 3:16) require the conclusion that love really *is* the point of the whole story?

Does not the truly radical claim that God became a human being and he *acted* in human history to reclaim and redeem what was lost, mean that the answer to the, "Why is there something rather than nothing?" question, *really is* something like...

... "Why for love, of course!"

Of course!

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Well, if love is the reason that the *universe* exists, it is surely also the reason that you and I exist, too. It is the reason that our church exists.

We are here for love.

To give love, to receive love, to share the love of God with all we meet. We exist to bear witness to the life-giving truth that the love of God has come near in Jesus Christ—at Christmas, and throughout the year—and to embody the character of this love in our relationships.

Which finally brings us to our text from Colossians. It is a simple text, not at all difficult to understand however difficult it is to put into practice. We are to "put on the clothes of Jesus Christ":

- compassion
- kindness
- humility
- meekness

- patience.

These words, these behaviours, these dispositions are to govern our lives, our interactions with our fellow Christians and everyone else we rub shoulders with week in and week out.

We are to “bear with one another” and “forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven us.”

Above all—above *all*... in other words, at the top of the list, the most important thing, the most absolutely crucial thing that we need to remember...

**“clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”**

Put on these clothes, Paul says, and the result will be harmony.

Not a life free of suffering, not an easy life by any means, but a life that goes along with the grain of the universe, a life that is properly aligned with the reason there is something rather than nothing!

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,” Paul says, “and be thankful.”

In a culture characterized by greedy acquisitiveness and ingratitude and selfishness, show a better way. Show by your lives that the world does not exist for these things, but for love.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.”

Remind yourselves often, of the story you are a part of, of the God who has called you his own.

“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.”

In other words, do everything in the name of the one who is love incarnate. Do *everything* out of the conviction that love is more real and lasting than hate, that life is more durable than death, that peace is stronger than violence, and that harmony will ultimately win out over chaos and destruction.

Do *everything* for love.

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A new calendar year stands before us. It is a year that will contain many challenges and obstacles. It is a year that, for some, will contain suffering and trial. It is a year that will yield joy and fulfillment, and opportunities for participating in what brings life and light.

It is a year that will also bring temptations to settle for lesser stories than the story of Christmas.

Sometimes, the world will seem futile, hopeless, meaningless... Sometimes, it will not be easy to believe that love is the reason for this whole story we are a part of.

It is at these times, that we will need each other most acutely. We will need to remind ourselves of this grand, radical claim that God became a human being to show us that love is the point of it all.

“The Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth,” John’s gospel reminds us. “In him was life, and the life was the light of all people” (John 1:4, 14).

God put on human “clothes” to show what human beings are for, what the world is for.

Why does the world exist? It exists for life, for light, for love.

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light,” says Isaiah (Isaiah 9:2)!

“Dear friends, let us love one another,” says John, “for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God” (1 John 4:7).

This is the point of Christmas. This is the story we are called to live out into a new year and beyond.

May God help us to be people whose lives give evidence of the firm conviction that we were *made* for love.

Amen.