

Have you ever had anyone come up to you and say that they have met your twin. That there's someone else in this world who looks like you. I was at General Synod this week, which is the annual meeting of the Church of Ireland across the island, and a minister stood on the stage – he's the minister of St Mark's Armagh – Malcolm Kingston, and he says that he often gets mistaken for the Dean of Limerick Cathedral Niall Sloan. Here's a photo to see what you think.

I also have over the years been told that I have a double. I never see it myself, but some would say that I am the spit of Gareth Malone the guy who trains choirs.

In Ephesians 4 verses 15,16 Paul calls the church the body of Christ. So my question for us today is who does our church body look like, who do we look like? Because there's only 2 options – we either look like Jesus or we look like the world. If we look like the world we will look and act like the non-believers we see around us every day. I don't mean physically but more in how we behave. We will talk like them and think like them and value the things they value. But the alternative is that we look like Jesus – we imitate how he deals with different issues in life, we respond to others the way he did.

And in this letter to the Church in Ephesus, Paul is asking us to choose who we align to. Well as a Church, and as I get us all to consider our RESET – that is to **re**think, **re**focus, **re**set our minds towards Jesus, then it's a time for **re**-examination of ourselves, and where necessary to **re**pent, **re**turn and actually to follow the **re**'s then to **re**semble Jesus.

IN our passage today Paul not only makes us consider how we align to Jesus, but also he talks about how we need to take off our old way of living and put on something new.

I'm sure some of you either in your past or present have uniforms to put on for work, whether that is as a police officer or a minister or a nurse. Whatever uniform is put on, it brings with it new expectations and new responsibilities. Similarly when we take off as verse 22 of our reading says, our old self, and put on in verse 24 our new self, then there are new expectations. We simply cannot use Christianity as a badge or label that gives us a free ticket into heaven. Things have to change to imitate Jesus. Paul talks about it a lot – for example, Galatians 3:6-7 *“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ”*. Or 2 Corinthians 5:17 *‘If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone’*. So as we move from one way of living to another it should be evident to all around us – and that is actually my prayer for all of us in this next season as a Church as we think about Resetting ourselves; that in our rethinking, in our refocus, we begin to imitate the teachings of Christ in our lives. I pray people can see Christ in us.

So let's look a little more at the contrast in our passage between living for yourself in the world and living for Christ in the world.

You might remember last week our passage began in Ephesians 4:1 where it says we are to walk worthy of the calling with which we have been called. Here in verse 17 Paul is insisting that they do not live as the Gentiles do. There's a danger of thinking that this doesn't apply to us. Remember that Paul is using this in a moral sense to distinguish between those who

are faithful to God and those that historically were against God. In today's context he is saying that if you say you are a Christian, then don't live like the surrounding non-believers in our society. If we are to walk worthy of the calling we have received then there's got to be some lifestyle changes that need reviewing and changed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

You simply cannot hold on to the spiritual clothes you previously wore. You cannot expect that with a bit of grit and determination that you can be a better you, no, something transformative has to happen in you that only God can do as you accept him into your life. Can I commend to you therefore that the starting point for this is a complete surrender to the will of God. If that doesn't happen then you are going to find this a real uphill struggle, because we need the Holy Spirit to do the transformation in us. If you want to explore this further, look out for Alpha in September. God doesn't make good people better, he makes dead people live. This is the good news of Jesus Christ, and so through it there is a desire in our hearts to leave the old self behind. None of this is of ourselves, this is about God's grace. This is about turning to the life that God has created for us, and becoming who we are in him.

Paul wants us to consider whether we are living contrary to God's standards. And he says about them, *"in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed"*. So this is describing a lifestyle that's all about the self – if it feels good do it, whatever looks good touch it. And isn't that exactly what we see in today's society? It's all about indulging myself. It's not defined by any moral standards – it's whatever makes me happy. But the Spirit of God says that we are not to live like that, don't walk like the Gentiles do, don't walk like the rest of the world does. Folks, we have got to walk differently. So Paul gives us a kind of dress code to live by. This is supposed to define your style. Paul says *"That, however, is not the way of life you learned ²¹ when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus"*.

Remember the repeated phrase in Ephesians – it's in Christ, in him, in him. As a little exercise, why not print out the book of Ephesians and highlight where you see the words In Christ, or In him (it's repeated x times). That's the emphasis here for how we live. We must live with him at the centre. Verse 20 & 21 is our story folks – we heard about Jesus, we were taught in him, and now it's our story to tell to others. We were taught, verse 22 to put off your old self. So change your clothes folks. To be who we are in Christ Jesus, we have got to change our clothes. Instead of being centred on ourselves, on our security, on our family's wellbeing, we've got to put on a new self.

I remember when we bought our house in Garvagh 20 years ago, and the farmer came in one day for a chat. He took his wellies off at the back door, but the smell of the farm definitely travelled in with him. He sat down and we made him lunch. After he had left, I went back to clear the kitchen table and noticed the chair that he had been sitting on. Without being too graphic this morning, the contents of the farm had literally come off his clothes and let's just say they left their mark on our kitchen chair. A kitchen wipe definitely didn't remove what he had left behind. But obviously we couldn't ask him to put on

different clothes coming into the house, but I'm sure his wife would make sure he would take his clothes off and probably shower before sitting down with the family.

As Paul says take off your old clothes, and put on new clothes, he's saying we are to be made new in the attitude of our minds, created to be like who? No longer ourselves, but to imitate God in righteousness and holiness. Otherwise we carry around with us a stench that unfortunately like my farmer friend leaves a stench.

If you have put your faith in Jesus then you have been given a new wardrobe. Now like any wardrobe I'm sure you don't just wear the same clothes every day – you change – you wash what's dirty – it's continual. I can remember growing up as a teen and having a laugh with one of my mates (apologies if this sound gross), but we used to remark that men's underwear lasts for 4 days – 1st day is fine, 2nd day turn it round the other way back to front, 3rd day turn it inside out, and then 4th day with it being inside out turn it round to the front – I told you it was gross. But clearly unless you're at Summer Madness for 5 days, this is never something you do. You change every day. It's continual. And Paul here is emphasising that this attitude is a routine that we should continually do spiritually. Yes you are redeemed, yes you are saved by grace, you are chosen, but it's a daily continual process of changing to be more like Jesus. And so as the passage goes on he gives us more of a picture of what this looks like. Verse 25 -32.

Paul starts saying that in your relationships we must not be about falsehood – it's not about hiding behind false pretences, it's not about be dishonest, but instead it must be about being truthful. The other night Alison had to go into our outbuildings to get something, and in it she found a damaged TV screen that I was meant to take to the dump about a month ago. She reminded me that I had said it was away, and in honesty I was telling a little lie. Yes it was out of the house but it wasn't at the dump. We've got to be truthful. We've got to rid ourselves of those little white lies. Some might say, well it's not causing any harm, compared to what other people do. But as we get used to getting away with those things, the routine of doing it becomes more regular. Remember this is no longer just about you, it's about this body of Christ that is impacted by your actions.

And then Paul talks about anger. Anger is something that all of us face – it's a reality of being human. This passage suggests that there is anger that doesn't lead to sin. For example, I get angry when I see people being taken advantage of, and that is what I call a righteous anger. But it's pretty hard to prevent anger leading to something else, for example revenge. Which is why Paul warns about the devil getting a foothold through it. It's an easy trap for us to fall into our old wardrobe of clothes. Instead Paul wants the peace of Christ to rule our hearts (Colossians 3:15). If we make a regular routine of taking off our old self, and putting on our new self we will make a regular routine of putting off our anger and learn to forgive. Christ doesn't desire for his Church to be filled with people who bear grudges and can't move on from it – that's holding on to your old clothes. Take them off, leave your anger behind. Jesus said in Matthew 5:24 that before we come with a gift to the altar, in other words, before we come in worship to God, we have to be first reconciled to our brothers and sisters. Is there someone today that you are holding a grudge against? Well take those clothes off and imitate Christ.

Now Paul moves on to stealing. The old self steals, it cuts corners. It's not just about stealing something. It's wider. It's easy to cut some corners. Maybe leaving work early, or your submission of tax returns, and all kinds of other examples. Paul gives an alternative to stealing and talks about work. It's no longer about what I can take out of life for me, but it's about doing for others. Paul is saying that even what we do with our hands is there to bless others, not so that I can build up a nice retirement, it's to put on a new self to think about the other person in need. Instead of thinking about yourself, start offering yourself to God's service.

And then verse 29 about unwholesome talk versus building up others. All of us love a good story or gossip – “oh did you hear what's happening with that couple, or did you hear that the rector has done this, or did you know such and such has decided to do this”. That's unwholesome talk. Paul says to take those garments off, and instead build each other up in our words. And actually if you can't say anything good about a person, well maybe the answer is just not to say anything at all. Stop gathering in a huddle and talking about someone. Just keep it to yourself, and pray that God will show you the grace that he has shown you, and then over time he will teach you how to lift someone up rather than put them down through what comes from your mouth.

Next, Paul says don't grieve the Holy Spirit. It means don't do all these things that we have just talked about. Remember what Paul said in Chapter 1, that “*When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory*”. Paul says don't walk out on that – you have been given a new set of clothes, so don't go back to the old way.

And so as we finish let's look at verse 32 – “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you”. Christ is not only the pattern for our new clothes, he is the power behind it. He is not only the standard by which we are called to live, he is the very one who enables us to do it. If we have put our faith in him, he has extended his hands of forgiveness to us. And this is the message, if you have been forgiven, then live as the forgiven, if you have been raised with Christ, then live as those who have been raised. If you have put your faith in Jesus, then the old has gone, the new has come, it's time to Review where you are at and whether you are still wearing those old stinking clothes. I believe that now is the time in our Parish to Reset and come back to Christ, make him more important than anything else in your life, and remember that you have been given new clothes. So folks, go from here and start wearing them. Be an imitation of Jesus Christ in your daily life. Folks, I am so confident that when we as individuals within this church family start reflecting the life of Jesus in our lives, we will then become so much more effective for the work of the Gospel that God has planned for us to do. If we simply continue to live in our old clothes and think that we can continue to do all the church programmes, then as Paul says we are nothing other than a clanging gong. God desires that we radiate Christ in our lives. Let's take this time in our lives to honestly review our walk with the Saviour. May God's Holy Spirit direct our thinking and draw us closer to Jesus.