

“Brand Jesus”

Colossians 3:1-17

Most of you probably haven't noticed that I've been wearing the same wardrobe for the past 16 years that I've served as your pastor.

My wife has given up reminding me that I'm still wearing some of my Dad's shirts who died 16 years ago. My daughter does gift me with a new shirt, pants, or sweater for Christmas as does my Mother. I attribute it to growing up in a frugal family in which my grandma would patch my jeans when holes appeared from hay and straw bales brushing against them while loading and unloading bales. The stems would cut my legs without the patches.

The young people I see wearing jeans with holes obviously aren't baling any hay this summer and therefore don't care how big the holes are because holes are now in style.

I read an article about some eighth graders walking into an art class and noticing that their teacher has worn *the same boring outfit day after day for months!* Like, really? Aren't art teachers supposed to be all colorful and stuff? Is she weird? Or has she been around tempera paint and hot glue a little too long?

Actually, she is one of the coolest teachers in the school, and her fashion statement really rubbed off on these adolescent consumers.

Meet Julia Mooney, an art teacher at William Allen Middle School in Moorestown, New Jersey. At the beginning of the 2018 school year, she put on a simple gray button-down dress and then wore it every school day for 100 days straight.

It wasn't about being weird. For Mooney, it was about teaching her students about the growing "culture of excess" that has filled American closets to overflowing with cheap clothing that isn't ethically sourced or manufactured and that, most of the time, eventually winds up in a landfill.

The typical American now buys 60 percent more items of clothing than they did 15 years ago and keeps them half as long. Mooney thinks this is a major problem on a lot of levels. "There's no rule anywhere that says we have to wear a different thing every day," says Julia. "Why do we ask this of each other? Why do we require that we each wear something different every day and buy more clothes and feed into this fashion culture?"

Instead, Julia advocates for what she calls "sustainable fashion": wearing clothing that's made in an eco-friendly way; buying fewer, but better-made pieces of clothing; wearing the same clothes more often; and making sure they're recycled when they are replaced or no longer needed.

And Julia's not alone in her thinking. More and more clothing manufacturers are making clothing out of recycled materials and eschewing unsustainable products such as petroleum-based synthetic rubber for corn-based materials in things like shoes. Buying better-made products and wearing them longer is the new fashion statement!

Rather than rolling their eyes at her, Mooney’s students seem to be on board with the trend she set. Some of them began their own experiment of wearing the same clothes on consecutive days (though not for 100!), while some of their teachers got into the act as well. And, yes, in answer to the obvious question, Julia does wash her dress frequently!

It’s not about hygiene — it’s about wearing something of quality for the long haul while making a difference in the world.

In Colossians 3, the apostle Paul makes a similar statement about the sustainable fashion that marks the “outfits” of Christians.

For Paul, however, this fashion isn’t so much about what disciples of Jesus put on their bodies but about how they clothe their “minds”: Verse 2 . . . Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. Because Christians have been “raised with Christ,” we should “seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” (v. 1). It’s about a mindset that seeks to sustain the life that is “hidden with Christ in God” until Christ is revealed (v. 3). For Paul, the only label that matters is the one put on us by the risen Christ!

Mooney bucked the trend of most of the world that seeks to wear whatever is trendy and expendable. We live in a culture where people seem to change their minds as much as they change their clothes. If you are what you wear, then Paul says that we are fast, cheap and easy when it comes to our spiritual clothing as well. If you’re going to live sustainably, then you have to be willing to first do a purge of whatever you’ve been hiding in the back of the closet. “Put to death, therefore, whatever is in you that is earthly . . .” says Paul (v. 5). Get rid of the junk that you’ve

been keeping that doesn't fit anymore: "the ways you also once followed" when you were living life apart from Christ (v. 7). Dump things like "anger, wrath, malice, slander and abusive language from your mouth" (v. 8). These are the things that the rest of the world puts on and displays regularly as a way of comparing themselves to one another.

A new mindset, a sustainable mindset, begins with stripping off "the old self with its practices" (v. 9) and replacing your spiritual wardrobe with a new one — a "new self" that is "being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator" (v. 10).

Sophia and David were created in the image of God. From the beginning God created humans in God's own image. Remember that those first humans started out "naked and unashamed" and it was only after their sin that they began comparing themselves to one another and "knew that they were naked." Because of that original sin, God sends Jesus to forgive us, to cleanse us, to make us new in the waters of Baptism. God makes Sophia and David his own in the sacrament of Baptism. Then it becomes our responsibility to teach them and model for them what it means to be created in the image of God and to embody the love, forgiveness, and servanthood of Jesus in our relationships with one another.

What do we look like, what do we act like as parents, god-parents, grandparents, and indeed the whole congregation as we teach our children, as we model for our children how to be a follower of and a believer in Jesus Christ?

What matters is not what you wear on the outside but what you're wearing inside. "Christ is all and in all," says Paul, and when Christ is in you, then your spiritual clothing and mindset will reflect him regardless of whether your outer clothes come from Goodwill or Saks.

So, what does that sustainable spiritual wardrobe look like? Like most of our closets, it needs to have some basic pieces that are the foundation for everyday wear. "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience" (v. 12).

Notice that Paul says that we should clothe *ourselves* with these things, which means that they are a conscious choice. Just as a person stands in front of his or her closet every morning and wonders what to put on, Paul suggests that we who have been "raised with Christ" make a daily choice to put on his character for display to the rest of the world. We are to "bear with one another" and "forgive each other" as the Lord has forgiven us (v. 13).

But over all these things we are to put on love, "which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (v. 14). Love is the characteristic that completes the ensemble and marks us as belonging to the Jesus brand. It's the article of our spiritual clothing that becomes more broken-in and comfortable with extended, everyday use. It never wears out, and it never goes out of style. We've been given the perfect pattern of love in Jesus, and when we let the "peace of Christ" rule in our hearts, we become "one body" that can influence the world to dress like we do and to become part of Jesus' brand as well. Our teaching, our admonishing one another in wisdom, our worship and our every word and deed are commercials that point to Christ (v. 16 . . . 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.

Mooney understood that what we present to the world from our inner selves is far more important than what we drape over our outer selves. What really matters is that we are living to make a better world. It's a daily choice to move away from the culture of excess to the culture of enough.

When we make the daily choice to put on the character of Christ even before we put on our clothes, we make a fashion statement that the world can't help but notice! "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" (v. 17).

Brand Jesus is the only one that is sustainable forever!

May the peace of God . . .

WOV #770 – Borning Cry