Travel anywhere in the world and one of the first things you will notice about the people who live in that other country is the clothes they wear. Most of us in the United States wear similar kinds of garments. Not to stereotype, but men may wear trousers, a shirt, perhaps a tie and, for some occasions, a jacket. Most women consider the skirt or dress a staple in their wardrobe. Jeans have become so popular that some businesses now permit employees to wear them on more casual workdays. I could go on, but clothes give some definition to a culture.

When we live in the culture of the Christian faith, does our “spiritual wardrobe” give some definition to who we are and, if you please, the “style” embraced by those who follow Jesus Christ? Paul seemed to think so. In fact, in at least two of his letters to those young churches who looked to him for guidance, he spoke of Christian believers as being *clothed* with Christ. Our lesson from Galatians reads:
“For many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” Later in his life, he wrote the Colossians, “you have clothed yourselves with the new self,” and again, “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.”

All of us who are baptized into Christ are clothed with Christ. What does the person clothed in the Lord looks like? “compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience” and oh so many more virtues we see in the life of Jesus Christ. This idea harkens back to that moment remembered today in the Gospel when Jesus said to the twelve, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” To follow Jesus as Lord is to take up the cross – the instrument of death, self sacrifice and self-giving – and clothe ourselves with the One who gave his life for us all.

How does one change a wardrobe? How do we of faith clothe ourselves with Christ, bearing the cross of Christ in this world loved by
Christ? That is the question that these texts raises and refuses to let us go on. Fortunately, Paul gives us much help when he tells us our baptism is the rite, the passage, the entry into Christian faith that triggers our being clothed with Christ. How so?

Baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit pictures by sacrament our new birth into the family of God. Sometimes different denominations of Christ-followers are prone to quibble over the smaller detail of how someone is baptized, and miss the greater affirmation that we are baptized. Someone, someplace, at one time, sprinkled, or poured, or dipped you into water and said in the name of the Holy Trinity that you are a child of God. You were given a name and an identity, claimed as God’s own now and for all eternity.

So there we are, dripping wet, needing a garment, some piece of clothing to cover our nakedness. What does God give us? Paul tells us God clothes us with the very One in whose name we have received
baptism. We are clothed with Christ, named by Christ, to look and act and become like Christ from that moment on.

Let’s go quickly now to a second aspect of being clothed with Christ. Nowhere in our lessons does it say that we get to choose what this Christ-clothing looks like. In Luke, we are told that following our Lord requires a cross. The cross is not a negotiated or “I’ll think about it” symbol of the faith. If you follow Christ, you pick up your cross daily and follow him. There is no other option.

This same truth applies to our lives “clothed” with Christ. Nowhere are we given color choices, sleeve lengths, or seasonal fabrics. Clothed with Christ is the only choice we have. In the early years of automobile manufacturing, someone asked Henry Ford about color options for his Model “T”. Said Ford, “you can have any color you want so long as it’s black.” Our garments of faith come in any color we want so long as it’s Christ. He chooses our wardrobe. We “wear” him humbly and gratefully.
There is one last insight into our being clothed with Christ. Did you notice Paul tied being clothed with Christ to all other believers? If you look around the room, you will see, according to Paul, that what you have on looks very similar to what every brother and sister is wearing. Paul put it this way, “All of you are one in Christ Jesus.” All of us who wear Christ claim the same “look” as all our brothers and sisters in faith. We may speak different languages, wear the garments unique to our culture, but all of us baptized into Christ are clothed with Christ.

So here we are, baptized believers in Christ, clothed with Christ, asking ourselves what this means as followers of Christ? I could list more, but consider these three simple responses. First, because we are clothed with Christ there is no place for prejudice, bigotry, or discrimination in our lives. Paul tells the Galatians that a new order has broken into our world that erases all labeling from our human vocabulary. We of faith must be advocates for the dignity of every person in every culture of every ethnicity first in our community and
ultimately in societies everywhere. Our being clothed with Christ says to others all are valued by Christ.

Second, God calls us to be advocates for what I call inclusive belonging. One common trait among all humans is this longing to be included. From childhood, we want someone to pick us for their team, to invite us into their group, to be accepted by our peers. Imagine what would happen in our Church, in this community, in our country if Christian believers lived with outstretched hands, bringing all God’s people together to celebrate the gift of being clothed with Christ? Belonging is a word worth celebrating! How many of you sit in the same place each week? How many of you know if someone new sits in your space? How many of you have ever introduced yourself to that person? Why do we hesitate to be welcoming?

You see, we who are clothed with Christ are family. Paul says we “are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.” God has written all of us into God’s estate plan and wants to lavish on us all the
wealth of his love. Clothed with Christ, we are heirs with Christ, God’s beloved family. Look around. What are you wearing? Hear the good news that by God’s grace, we are all clothed with Christ.