

Are you dressed? Revd. Mike Loader Assistant Priest

You may say, “what sort of question is that?”, so I want in this article to look at what we as Christians should ‘put on’, how should we be dressed? This is a topic we took a short look at in one of our recent zoom bible studies, and please feel free to join us if you can at 2.30 on a Tuesday afternoon. Contact Mike for further details.

You may remember that in the Collect for the first week of Advent we pray, “Almighty God, give us the grace to cast away the works of darkness and to ‘put on’ the armour of light.” So what do the scriptures mean by ‘put on’?

There are some 57 uses of this small phrase throughout the scriptures, although not all are relevant to our lives as Christians. So let us start by looking at its use in some Old Testament verses, so it would be good to have an open Bible with you.

In the book of Leviticus (14v17-18) the Priests were instructed to ‘put on’ holy oil to the tip of the right ear, the thumb of the right hand, the great toe of the right foot, and upon the head, of someone who came to be cleansed-from their sin. Perhaps we can see that in this case the ‘putting on’ was to show how the hearing, what was listened to, the actions and path that was taken, and the thoughts that a person possesses, need to be holy, or we could say, that are acceptable in God’s sight.

Later Job describes how he ‘put on righteousness and it clothed him’. Here we begin to see the idea of ‘putting on’ having a meaning of ‘getting dressed’. Exactly what Job meant by ‘righteousness’ in that context is not evident, but we may get a clue later.

We then read that the prophet Isaiah (51v9) says that it is necessary to ‘put on strength’, which he describes as ‘a beautiful garment’, again relating to our idea of getting dressed, perhaps showing that we need to consider the effect of the actions that we are about to undertake.

Later Isaiah (59v17) says that we are to ‘put on righteousness as a breastplate and a helmet of Salvation’. Does that start to ring any bells? Have we not heard something similar from the Apostle Paul in the New Testament (Ephesians 6v14 & 1 Thessalonians 5v8). Perhaps like me you have found that many OT concepts are also echoed in the NT as well. What did St Augustine say? “Be prepared to find the Lord Jesus latent in the Old Testament as He is patent in the New Testament”.

And lastly from the OT the prophet Ezekiel twice (Ez 42v14 & 44v19) describes how the Priests were to ‘put on’ ‘special holy garments’ when they went into the Temple court to minister at the altar. Interestingly they were instructed to remove these ‘holy garments’ and put on other garments before they went near the people in the outer courts because they-the garments-could communicate holiness to the people. This perhaps seems somewhat strange and contrasts with us who, as Paul tells us (2Cor2v15) as Christians are to communicate the ‘sweet aroma of Christ’.

I hope you have worked out that the phrase from our Collect to, 'put on the armour of light' was taken from Paul's letter to the Romans (13v12), where he goes on to say, 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ' (13v14), a phrase Paul also uses in Ephesians (6v11).

Perhaps that phrase to 'put on Christ', helps us to understand why we are to 'put on the armour of light'. We know that Jesus described himself as 'the light of the world' (John 8v12), famously depicted in the painting by Holman Hunt, whose one time house in Jerusalem was near the Anglican School where I taught. But exactly how are we to 'put on Christ'?

Perhaps we get some idea of this from what Paul wrote to the Galatians (3v27), where he says, if we have been baptised into Christ then we have 'put on' Christ, so is Christ reflected in our lives?

Paul goes on to explain this in both Ephesians (4v24) and Colossians (3v10). We are to 'put on the new nature', a nature created after the likeness of God, His image, of true righteousness and holiness. So just how is that possible?

Previously in Ephesians (4v22-23) Paul reminds us that one of the purposes of our pilgrimage here below is so that we can learn to 'put off' our old self, and to let the Holy Spirit renew our minds. This transformation into the image of Jesus is so that we may, 'with unveiled faces reflect the glory of the Lord' (2Cor 3v18). For most of us this is by no means an instantaneous process, but we should demonstrate the 'intensifying glory' of Jesus in our lives.

This 'new nature' that we are to 'put on', a new nature to show the glory of Christ, is best understood as Paul describes to the Colossians (3v12 & 14). We are God's chosen ones- what a lovely phrase- we are to 'put on' compassion, kindness, meekness, patience, and learning to practice forgiveness towards one another. All of these Paul encompasses in the little phrase to 'put on love'.

But remember brothers and sisters, we are in a battle with the evil powers in the spiritual realm around us, a realm we overlook at our peril. So when we rise each morning it would do us good to remember that as we get dressed we need to 'put on the whole armour of God' (Ephesians 6v11-17) in order to 'stand against the wiles of the devil'.

Perhaps that would make a good new year's resolution for us all.

So just two final observations.

What did Job mean by 'putting on righteousness'? We do not know for certain when Job lived, some say at the very early time of the Patriarchs, and others at the time of the Babylonian exile. If this latter were the case then Job would have been familiar with the writings of the Prophet Isaiah and his lovely verse (Is61v10) "I will rejoice greatly in the Lord, my soul will exult in my God; for He has clothed me with garments of salvation and wrapped me in a robe of righteousness".

And what of our future? Paul asked the Corinthians (2Cor5v2) "do we groan and long to 'put on' our heavenly dwelling?" I take that to mean our new 'resurrection bodies'. That is what Paul seems to imply when he describes what will happen when we die, saying

(1Cor15v22) “We shall ‘put on’ an imperishable nature”, that is when our mortal bodies shall ‘put on’ immortality. I trust that hope helps us to calm our fears, and to trust in the one true God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Blessings, and a happy and hopefully more normal new year to you all.

Rev Mike