

September 6, 2026

The Suitcase Sermon

By Pr. Beate Chun

The Suitcase

[A large suitcase sits near the front of the church.]

Look! A suitcase!
It was here when I arrived this morning.
Naturally, I went and inspected it.
And here is what I discovered.

First of all, a note.

“For the people of St. Matthew’s.”

Well.
Naturally, I opened it.
And inside I found these:
An envelope!
With lots of little cards inside.
Let’s have a look!
Oh, there is another note!

It says:

*“The bearer of each claim check is entitled
to receive a garment with special powers.”*

Aha! So these little cards are actually claim checks.
And it looks like there are enough for each one of us!

[The preacher and/or the ushers pass one claim check to each person.]

[Once everyone has received a card:]

Okay. Let's see what you've got.

The front is always the same:

PUT ON CHRIST

Romans 13:14.

Now let's look at the back.

This one says HOPE.

This one says COURAGE.

LOVE.

PATIENCE.

And the back is different.

Look at the back of your card. What did you get?

Who got LOVE?

Who got HOPE?

COURAGE?

PATIENCE?

So, that's what the note meant when it told us:

*"The bearer of each claim check is entitled
to receive a garment with special powers."*

We are meant to put on Christ!

That was actually part of our reading today.

Romans 13:14 says: Put on Christ!

So this suitcase comes with an invitation:

Put on Christ.
Each one of us will get a garment.
But the garment is not an ordinary garment.
It is actually putting on Christ himself.
And with that, we are given
the power and strength of Christ!
for us to wear,
to carry,
to possess as our own.

That changes everything!

Putting on Christ -
That changes everything!
For twelve Sundays this summer,
we have been listening to Paul's Letter to the Romans.
And we have been discovering
together the many ways
God's grace takes hold of human life.

Now we have come
into the final weeks of our journey.
And more and more,
Paul speaks about our life together
as a faith community—
and about the calling of a faith community in the world.

Paul speaks about love.
Love for our neighbor.
Love for our enemies.
Love for the stranger.

And love sounds wonderful.
Until it becomes concrete.
Because love is not always comfortable.
Sometimes love asks hard things of us.

Sometimes love asks us
to go places where we would rather not go.
It asks us to listen when we would rather speak.
To stay when we would rather walk away.
To forgive when we would rather hold on to our anger.
To make room when we would rather close the door.
Sometimes love asks us to see another person
not as a problem,
not as an opponent,
not as someone who belongs on the other side—
but as a human being
whom God loves.

That's when love becomes difficult.
And that's also when I realize
how much I need Christ.
I am only too aware of how often I fall short.
I don't love the way I wish to love.
I am not always patient enough.
Or kind enough.

And sometimes I do terrible things
without even realizing they are terrible.
And so, when I read all the many things
Paul wants us to do,
I get discouraged.
I can never live up to it.

But this!
This suitcase and what's in it—
that changes everything.

This suitcase tells me
that I can receive what I need from Christ.
I can put on Christ.

I don't have to manufacture love,
or patience, or courage out of my own strength.
I can receive them.
I can put them on.
I can put on Christ.
This changes everything.

All we need is already provided!

Paul doesn't say:
Make yourself into a more loving person.
He says something very different:
"Put on the Lord Jesus Christ."
Put on Christ.

That is what these little cardboard claim checks are here for—
to remind us that we can claim
the power of Christ whenever we need it.
We put on Christ.
We allow Christ to clothe us.
Because the things Paul asks of us—
love,
patience,
forgiveness,
compassion,
courage,
hope—
are not simply things
we can produce by trying harder.
They are gifts.
And we receive them.

The mysterious purple cloth

But there is one more thing in here.
[The preacher reaches into the suitcase

and slowly pulls out the purple cloth.]

A purple cloth!

And another note.

*“This is a gift handed down from
the ancient faith community founded by St. Mark.
It is a purple cloth which has been replaced
in each generation and given to a new faith community.
This purple cloth comes with a story:*

*When Jesus was handed over to be crucified,
the soldiers put a purple robe on him.
But it wasn’t an honor.
They were mocking him.
They dressed him like a king—
and then they laughed at him.
The robe that was supposed to signify power
became a garment of humiliation.”*

Truly, this suitcase is full of surprises!

And full of wonderful stories.

First, the claim checks

and the gift of the special garments for all of us.

And now this mysterious purple cloth—
a reminder across time and space
that long before we were invited
to put on Christ,
Christ first allowed himself to be clothed in our humanity.

This suitcase was brought to us.
But it doesn't belong to us.
Eventually, it will have to be returned to its owner.

But what it brought us—
that is ours to keep.
The reminders.
The gifts.
The possibility of putting on Christ.
The possibility of loving one another
in ways we could not imagine on our own.

And then there is this.
This one doesn't go back into the suitcase.
This purple cloth stays.

[The preacher slowly carries the purple cloth to the altar
and places it there.]

Perhaps this is where it belongs.
Here.
At this table.

[The preacher places the communion elements on the purple cloth.]

Because here we receive Christ.
Here we receive what we cannot give ourselves.
And then we take Christ with us.

[The preacher returns to the suitcase,
closes it, and puts it away.]

The suitcase goes back.
But what it brought us remains.
And so does the invitation:
Put on Christ.
And see what becomes possible.

Sermon for Sunday, September 6, 2026

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The 14th in a series of Sermons on the Letter to the Romans.

Text: [Romans 13:8-14 NRSVue - Love for One Another - Owe no one - Bible Gateway](#)

Tags: Romans 13:8-14 | Putting on Christ | All we need is provided.