

Sermon for August 12, 2018
“The Body of Christ: Imitating God”

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

When I was a child I noticed that I was not allowed to do things that other children's parents let them do. I remember arguing with my dad, “But Joey has a mini bike and a BB gun,” or “Max doesn't have to go to church every Sunday,” or “Other kids get to stay up later on school nights.” My parents had a set response to that line of reasoning: “That's other people. We're different.”

Paul the Apostle is explaining to the Christians in Ephesus that we are different from other people. We have a different set of standards and expectations. Other people may deal falsely with one another and lie and steal, but we are different. We speak truthfully to each other in love, and we don't steal, but work honestly. In our work we don't just work for our own gain, but we work so that we can help others. Others talk about people behind their backs and in malice try to assassinate others' character. Christians are supposed to try to build one another up and be kind to each other and forgiving.

This is a lot of advice to take in. Paul sums it up at the beginning of chapter 5. He says, “be imitators of God as beloved children.” Have you ever seen a child playing? Much of their play is an imitation of adults. They act out the things they see their parents doing. Speaking of beloved children imitating their parents. Consider how Jesus, of whom God said this is my beloved, imitated his father by sacrificing his life for us! As the adopted children of God, we should imitate our Father in heaven.

Today's sermon is the fifth in a series that goes through the book of Ephesians. Ephesians tells us about the church as the Body of Christ. We have learned that as the Body of Christ we are blessed “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” We have learned that Christ has broken down the barriers between us and united us in the Body of Christ. We learned that we have been given the power of God's love to guide, strengthen and inspire us. We have learned that we must rely on the grace of God to be the Body of Christ. This week we hear that we should imitate God.

So this all begs the question: What is it about God that we should imitate? God of course is the creator. The Bible tells us that God spoke the worlds into existence out of nothing. God made the land and sea and the sky and all the creatures that live in them. And God created us. Also, the Bible says repeatedly that it was good. God created a world that was very good.

Now none of us can speak planets and stars into existence. But God has given us some creative power. We have the power to create an atmosphere in our lives. With our attitudes and actions, we can create around us an atmosphere of love or one of hate. We can create anxiety in others or we can bring peace. We can agitate others, or we can bring healing.

We should imitate God in the little worlds we create in our lives. God made a good world. One where all things were in harmony. We should imitate our Heavenly Father. In our lives we should seek to foster those same things. We should seek harmony and an atmosphere of peace.

We should imitate God by trying to create a good atmosphere in our lives. God creates, but God also blesses! God is in the blessing business. God blessed Adam and Eve by giving them the Garden of Eden to tend. When they sinned and had to be punished, God blessed them by giving them clothes. God blessed the children of Israel by leading them out of slavery. And when he blessed the world by sending the Son. One of the first things Jesus said was “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” “blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,” and so on.

God’s plan for humanity was to bless us. When God called Abraham and Sarah, God said, “And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. . . . and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves.” (Genesis 12:2-3) God’s plan from the beginning was to bless the world through the descendants of Sarah and Abraham. Through them the Father sent Jesus!

We too should seek to be a blessing to the world. God has blessed us with love and joy and hope and peace and faith and grace and . . . the list goes on. We should seek to share those blessings with others. As the spiritual descendants of Abraham and Sarah we should be a blessing to the nations. As beloved children imitating our Father, we should seek to bless others with the storehouse of blessings God has given us.

As beloved children we should imitate our Father by creating a good world around us and by seeking to bless others. We should also imitate God’s sacrificial love. Of course, Jesus is the ultimate example of God sacrificial love. Jesus left the glories of heaven to come and dwell with us. Then he humbled himself to help others and even to wash his disciple’s feet. He then made the ultimate sacrifice, giving his life for our sins.

We all know of people who have imitated God in this way. We call them martyrs or heroes. People who give their life for the faith or for the welfare of others. Fire fighters and police officers and soldiers, seeking to save others’ lives, sometimes make the ultimate sacrifice. And people still die for the faith in some parts of the world.

But most of us will never be given the opportunity to die for another. How can we imitate God’s sacrificial love? Jesus gave us a living example. Before he died for others, he lived for others. He sacrificed his wants and desires for others. He fasted for 40 days to put the Devil in his place. Right before he died he took on the role of a slave and washed his disciples’ feet. We too can make those little sacrifices. On a daily basis in the little ways that present themselves we can give of ourselves for others in imitation of our Father.

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.” (Ephesians 5:1) The idea has taken many different forms. In 1896 Charles Sheldon wrote a book [In His Steps](#). In the book he challenged people to follow in the footsteps of Jesus in the way they live. In this book Sheldon coined the now popular question “What Would Jesus Do?”

But how can we follow in those footsteps. How can we, mere humans, imitate the Almighty? If we had to do it on our own it would be impossible. But Jesus is more than our example of how to live. He died not just to give us an example of love to follow. He also died to redeem us and save us from our sin.

Jesus died for you and me. He saved us and gave us eternal life. Then let us seek to follow his example of love and blessing. Let us dedicate ourselves, as beloved children, as the Body of Christ, to be imitators of God!