

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent  
Ephesians 5:1-9  
March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018

The text for this morning's sermon is the Epistle reading appointed by the church-ancient, Ephesians chapter five the first nine verses. But in order to grasp how this chapter in this letter from St. Paul starts – the chapter that starts: *“Therefore, be imitators of God,”* – we should go back and see what the “therefore” is there for. So, the last verse of the previous chapter reads like this: *“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Therefore, be imitators of God as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*

Two things are important to understand from these words: 1) a proclamation that we are forgiven and loved by God and 2) that we should be working to do the same for our fellow neighbors. It sounds so nice. God loves you and you should love your neighbors. That's nice.

But then Paul convicts us. He says, *“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immortality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place... No immoral, impure or greedy person – such a man is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.”* It seems as though Paul turns from telling us what we have in Christ and what we should be doing for our neighbor, to harsh words that convict us to the very core of our being.

And perhaps Paul said such things like this because our lives reflect the need to hear such harsh words. All of us heard them again today. Those words are an exhortation to be like Christ in love and forgiveness toward our neighbor. And then that word is conviction of how our lives stack up to what God demands by a righteous life. These direct words look like our lives.

God's people are gathered here and everywhere for this Sunday morning time together in the presence of the Lord. But the other 167 hours out of your week are spent elsewhere. And what does your life look like? I would suspect that your life out there is not like your life right here, right now. I know what your life looks like. Your life looks like the drudgery of worry and fear that consumes you all week long. Your life has scandal in it – maybe both public and private. Your life includes thoughts and deeds that are not after the Lord's heart. I know your life – your life involves families that are misplaced and wrought with problems. You have problems with employment. You have problems with other family members who say harsh things – or ignore you – or chastise you unjustly. Your kids don't appreciate you. Your parents don't appreciate you. Parents don't appreciate their kids and kids don't appreciate their parents. You tell and live lies. You keep secrets and hope that no one finds out. You cry some night because you don't know what you are going to do – the pain is too much – the hurt is too deep.

Did I describe you? Did I just strike a nerve? I know I hit something you are dealing with in that litany of sin and suffering I just shared. How do I know? The reason: because I live this life too. I have an extended family and I have good friends. I have problems and so do the people I love. Divorce, separation, abandonment, fatigue, anxiety, depression, drugs and alcohol problems – I have dealt with it with the people that I love the most. And when Paul says things like he does in Ephesians chapter five – we begin to think – I'm not included in the Kingdom of God. How can I be – I am a part of that very list which says, *“No immoral, impure or greedy person has any inheritance in the kingdom of heaven.”* Where does that leave us?

God's law is heavy and it convicts all of us. And because it is so heavy we can thank God we are not saved by the law. There's much more for you and me in Paul's letter to the Ephesians – our text for today. It says, "*For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as Children of light.* How does one become "light?"

Well, do you remember Paul's words that preceded the first verse of our Epistle text for this 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent? It said, "*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as God has forgiven you.*" And then we heard those words of instruction that go with that last verse of chapter four: "*Be imitators of God.*" But before we can be imitators we need something to imitate. There must be something – in this case "someone"— to show us the way to live. Being "imitators" goes back to what Christ did first. He set the stage for our life on earth – how to treat our neighbor, showing us what's good for us and how valuable that will be for us and for our loved ones. But He also set the stage for our life in the world to come. He not only set the stage, He accomplished what needed to be done for each and every one of us – even if that long litany of shortcomings I mentioned earlier describes us totally and completely.

You see, this is our Lenten season. It sets the stage for a very Holy Week. And this "setting of the stage" for the Sundays and Wednesdays during this time of the year helps us to focus and contemplate our Lord's suffering and death. We contemplate this death because our sins led Him to suffer on that cross. He died for us because we would have surely died on our own without Jesus. Lent sets the stage for our Christian life by not only showing that Jesus is the one we imitate but also the one who lived for us. We are to imitate the one who loved us so much that He died a horrible death in our place – so that – we will never have to see eternal death. He took the punishment that we deserve upon Himself.

Beloved in the Lord, none of us could stand if our heavenly inheritance depended upon our "morally, pure and greedless" work. We are never perfect imitators of God. That's why we seek Him out to show us the way. That's why we rely on Him to do what we cannot do – give us life. We are in darkness, and when we are in darkness, we can see nothing. We can't see the right way to walk and we can't see that Jesus has already walked the walk of righteousness for us.

When it's dark, the chances of falling are pretty good. There might be something in the way that you didn't know was there. We trip and fall when there is no light. Sometimes we even can go the wrong direction... down a path that leads away from the attended destination. The truth is, we need our eyes open. We need the light to show us the way... in this dark world. There is so much in our way that desires to trip us up along the way that God would have us to go.

That's why we need the light. We need it today and every day. We need what God gives to our children in the simple yet effective message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to be fed by God each and every day of our lives. We need what we imitate – the life that Jesus lived for us – perfect and complete. We need Christ. Flee to Christ. Come to Christ our Lord. Receive His blessings and forgiveness. Live in the light. It shows you the way. And soon it will show the cross. That's where our life begins. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.