

Ephesians 4:30-5:2 Imitate Christ's Love! Pentecost 12 August 16, 2015 (Child – imitating)

By Pastor Kenneth Mellon, Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Pleasant Valley Rd., West Bend, WI

Grace and peace to You from God our Father who has called us to live in love in our Lord and Savior, Jesus. We read Paul's letter to the Christians at Ephesus in 4:30 that he might help them to better live for God. These are Your Words, heavenly Father. Help us to live by power of Your Word. Your Word is truth!

Dear Christian Friends,

It's common in our world, that when someone comes up with a good idea that soon others will copy it. It might be a gadget for a car or home or a good theme for a movie. Before you know it, someone is trying to make something similar, but not usually as good. We are told in our verses to copy Christ's love. But we may think, how can we ever come close to the great love of Jesus? God shows us how as He tells us:

Imitate Christ's love!

First, we imitate Christ's love because we are sealed by the Holy Spirit. To help the Ephesians know what love is and is not, Paul wrote what they should not do: "*Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*" (v.30) To be sealed by the Holy Spirit means that He has put His mark on us that we belong to God. People who see us should also see the influence of God's Spirit in our lives. There are some artists who have a distinct style like Norman Rockwell that when you see their paintings, you know who made it. So, it is to be with us and the Spirit who lives in us.

The last thing we should want to do is to grieve or resist the Holy Spirit by having sinful thoughts or words that harm others or that discredit our Savior. Since the Holy Spirit is working in us to keep us in the faith, we should not continue in sin against Him. Paul wrote, "*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.*" (v.31) Anger is not to control us, whether angry thoughts, words, or actions since it hurts us and opposes the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

To help us turn from those sins, Paul reminds us that we have been *sealed for the day of redemption*. When the Holy Spirit brought us to faith, whether at our baptisms or when we heard the Gospel, He gave us confidence to trust that Jesus is our Rescuer. We are redeemed, that is, Christ bought us back for God. He paid the full ransom. We were held captive by sin, but now by Christ's payment we have been set free to live as God's people. With such blessing, we cannot continue to let anger or bitterness hold us captive when the Spirit is offering us peace and joy in exchange!

Second, we imitate Christ's love because God forgave us. Paul wrote, "*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*" (v.32) Typically, we are kind or tender-hearted toward people who are kind to us or to people who are worthy of our help. We would not usually have compassion on lazy people or those who have hurt us or our families in word or action. Paul does not tell us to limit our forgiveness only to those who are worthy. He tells us to forgive all people; just as in Christ God forgave us! Jesus died for the sins of all people. There is no limited atonement only for the people that somehow earned God's favor. We all began as sinners under the judgment of God. Only by His grace in Christ did He call us to believe and receive forgiveness and eternal life.

His love and forgiveness are ours to share. The word "forgives" in the Greek means to let go or send something away. God through the work of Christ has sent our sins away. He no longer sees them as long as we have Christ as our Savior. So, we are to forgive, that is we are to stop holding on to the sins of those who sin against us. If we lack forgiveness or hold a grudge, it is like a heavy chain that weighs down our souls. We jeopardize our forgiveness from God by our lack of forgiveness. It puts a barrier between God and us. Yet, as we confess our lack of forgiveness and all other sins and trust in Christ, God forgives us.

Third, we imitate God's love as His children. Paul wrote, *"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children."* (v.1) Children, who have a close relationship with loving parents, naturally imitate them. We are loved by God. We are loved by God the almighty creator of all things! His love is not conditional. He doesn't say, if you don't get angry, I'll love you. God doesn't say, If you don't sin against Me, I'll love you. God says, I love you because that is who I am.

And it is because of who we are as children of God in Christ that God calls us to imitate Him. *"We love because He first loved us."* (1 John 4:19) We can love like Christ. We can serve as Christ has served us. We are to follow Him with an attitude of sacrifice. His sacrifice was to die so we could live as God's people. Paul wrote, *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live (sinful nature no longer in control), but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."* (Galatians 2:20) We love as we depend on Christ's forgiveness. We believe He will give us strength and wisdom to turn from the devil's temptations and from our own sinful desires. That strength comes to us through God's Word and in His Sacraments. Paul often wrote how our baptisms give us new life. God also said that His Word will accomplish in us what He desires. The Gospel of Christ tells us who we really are and that we will live eternally with our loving Savior so we can have love now!

Fourth, we imitate Christ's love because of His sacrifice. Paul wrote, *"Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."* (v.2) Picture our sins like a sharp spear following us in life ready to pierce us. *The wages of sin is death.* But Jesus gave Himself for us. He stepped between us and that spear so that He was pierced to death for us. Christ became a fragrant offering, pleasing to God. Only Jesus could offer Himself as a sacrifice in perfect love and obedience to God. This is what made Him the sweetest and most acceptable offering to God. Jesus' sacrifice turned away God's anger. Christ has removed the stench of our sin before God. Dare we seek to replace Christ's sweet sacrifice with the old stench of our angry thoughts, words, and actions?

Anger in itself is not a sin. It is an emotion. It becomes a sin when anger controls us instead of the love of Christ. He loved the unlovable. He forgave the worst of sinners. He welcomed those who could not repay Him. We were all those things and worse! If we are to imitate Christ, we need our full attention on Jesus. If we are to have a good relationship with other people it must be based on our relationship with Christ. If we have a sinful attitude against someone or wish them harm, and don't want to help them, then we have a problem not with people, but with our relationship with Jesus.

Jesus told a story about a manager who was forgiven millions of dollars that he had wasted. But he wouldn't forgive a \$20 debt owed to him. The meaning is: the man's lack of forgiveness showed his lack of love for God. He did not have faith. But, the Holy Spirit has given us true faith in Christ. He has connected us to all the blessings that Jesus won: His love, forgiveness, patience, kindness, and more. The Bible states, *"[Jesus] gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good."* (Titus 2:14) So, we don't need to worry when God tells us to imitate Christ's love. Despite our sinfulness, we are God's dearly loved children. God has given us a new life in Christ to love Him. God help us every day by faith to fix our eyes on Jesus and His love! Amen.