

Second Sunday in Lent



Imitate Me...

Keeping
a Holy Lent

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

FEBRUARY 24, 2013 - REV. LARRY MOFFET

The advice at the end of Paul's paragraph is really good:

²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven...

"Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved."

However, I've always wondered, "Why did Paul start this paragraph saying 'Imitate Me'?" Usually he focused all attention on Jesus Christ.

Why didn't he say, "Look at Jesus?" Or, "Look deep inside yourself, God is there."

Imitate me? Really.

Paul was so wrong at times. His letters, though possibly altered by his students, say things about women that are discriminatory. The same with slaves. Some of his writings seem way too defensive. Even harsh.

Paul was not a perfect example. I now think that is exactly his point. He is saying "I make mistakes. Imitate me in the way that I know I depend on God's Grace for everything, even life itself."

Dr. Bob Jewett, who gave the Mattingly Lecture here last Tuesday, makes the point even clearer. He points out that Paul was trying to make sure early Christians did not follow the path of the Disciples Jewett calls "the Super Apostles."

He points out the book of Acts tells us that the disciples closest to Jesus--James (the brother of Jesus), Peter, even John--started using rules and structures to impose their order on fledgling Christians. They borrowed hierarchies from the Jewish leaders of the time as well as the Roman Empire to structure Christian communities. They expected new Christians to do everything they did before being accepted as Christians. They set themselves up at the head of chains of command.

Paul kept on traveling among people who had never heard of Jesus or Jewish practices. He borrowed images from Greek poets and ideas from Greek philosophers to communicate. In order to reach people, he tried to be all things to all people. Sometimes he failed.

Always he focused on God's Grace, made real through Jesus Christ: *"Nothing can separate us from the Love of God in Christ Jesus..."*

Imitation does not have a good reputation in our culture. Who has not said (or heard a parent say to you) when a child did something others did and then got into trouble: "So, everyone else was doing it. If everyone else jumped off the cliff would you imitate them too?"

Did you hear the one about the man who yelled at his neighbor: "Tell your son not to imitate me. The neighbor said, "OK. Son, stop playing the fool."

The Super Apostles, were focused on structures instead of getting out there and working with people with no previous faith background.

Our Bishop says our churches are very well-structured in case the 1950's ever return. Do you remember the days when we tried to get everybody to read on the same page--everybody doing the same thing? Paul says, "Don't be like the Super Apostles. **Imitate me!**"

Go where the people are. Find out what they need. Talk in their language.

He uses the phrase to instruct churches as different as the rowdy folks in Corinth and the more respectable people in Philippi. The Philippians were very much like us. Philippi was a regional capital city with a lot of government workers who knew how to set up structures.

Paul loved the Philippians. Lydia and her group of (we are almost sure) women took him in. They cared for him. Some were wealthy compared to those around them, like us (by the world's standards).

Writing to them, he says, "**Imitate me!**" Don't imitate the people who try to get you to think you aren't good enough, those Super Apostles who are creating a super structure to package the Faith.

"Imitate me! I'm flawed. I know I depend on every moment on God's Grace. Grace lets me get out there and meet people where they are. **Imitate me!**"

¹⁷ Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me,
and observe those who live according to the example you have in us.

¹⁸For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ;

I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears.

¹⁹Their end is destruction; their god is the belly [sense of self-satisfaction];
and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things.

**Whom do you imitate? Who imitates you?
Ask yourself those questions this week.**

Maybe the game "Simon says" has a spiritual basis. We do need to practice imitating others—in little things and in big things.

This is not a bad thing, if we imitate Paul,
who points out that he is far from perfect. Neither are we.

Again and again, he admits imperfections, and says, "Rely on God's Grace."

Jesus invites us to come as we are:

³⁴Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets
and stones those who are sent to it!

How often have I desired to gather your children together
as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

We can imitate each other in accepting God's Grace, God's all-embracing, unconditional love.

A psychologist raised a glass of water. Everyone in the stress management seminar expected she'd ask the "half empty or half full" question. Instead, she asked: "How heavy is this glass of water?" Some said 8 oz. Some said 20 oz.

She said, "The absolute weight doesn't matter as much as how long I hold it. For a minute, it's not a problem. If I hold it for an hour, I'll have an ache in my arm. If I hold it for a day, my arm will feel numb and rigid. The weight of the glass doesn't change; yet the longer I hold it the heavier it becomes."

The stresses and worries in life are like that glass of water. Think about them for a while and nothing happens. Think about them a bit longer and they begin to hurt. If you think about them all day long, you'll feel paralyzed – incapable of doing anything. It's important to remember to let go of your stresses. Remember to set the glass down!

We call Lent a Time of Sacrifice, a Season of Spiritual Rigor. It's really a time to let our burdens down. Return! To the table God prepares for us in the wilderness. Wherever we are we are Citizens of Heaven:

You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life
[and wherever I am is where God will be setting a table in the wilderness,]

for I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. – Psalm 23

We do have a God worth returning to.

EPISTLE PHILIPPIANS 3:17 to 4:1

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me,
and observe those who live according to the example you have in us.

¹⁸For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ;

I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears.

¹⁹Their end is destruction; their god is the belly;

and their glory is in their shame;
their minds are set on earthly things.

²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven,
and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹He will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory,
by the power that also enables him
to make all things subject to himself.

²²Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

***GOSPEL LUKE 13:31-35**

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him,
'Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.'

³²He said to them, 'Go and tell that fox for me,

"Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures
today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.

³³Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way,
because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed away from
Jerusalem."

³⁴Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets
and stones those who are sent to it!

How often have I desired to gather your children together
as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not
willing! ³⁵See, your house is left to you.

And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you
say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."'

Imitate: My niece Jana, a high-achiever, decided in high school to set up a rigid minute-by minute calendar. She'd look at her mother and me, struggling to get everything done, yet adding one more effort into the day, and say, "Why do you two set yourselves up for failure?" You always try to schedule too much into one day. Be like me. I try to schedule everything realistically. That lowers my stress." Now she has two sons, 3 years and 7 months, who do imitate her!

Prayers of the Faithful:

We thank you for the tender love you have, O Christ, and your great desire to gather all of us together as a mother hen gathers her chicks. Help us to lay our burdens down and return to you with all our hearts.

Slight pause

For all who serve your people, O Christ,
and especially those who serve you in places torn by violence
or religious strife. We pray to you, God in your mercy, **Hear our Prayer**

For those who are hungry, in body or in Spirit,
and for those who do are struggling to find a smooth path
to return to your all-embracing arms,
help us to live lives that will help them to find a home at your Table.
God in your mercy, **Hear our Prayer**

For those who need to feel your healing power,
including Kathy Cummins who is recovering from surgery,
for Stu Vculek, who is now in St. Elizabeth's Hospital,
for those who struggle with the infirmities of this life,
and for those who care for all who are ill. We pray to you,
God in your mercy, **Hear our Prayer**

For those who have died, and for all anywhere who are ill or who grieve.
God in your mercy, **Hear our Prayer**

Give us so deep a faith that in all times and in all places
we may without fear commit those we love and ourselves
to your constant love and care.
We pray to you, God in your mercy, **Hear our Prayer.**

Larry gathers up Prayer Concerns and Joys--then continues in prayer:

We ask for your deep joy to give us courage as we commit to walk
Lord Jesus Christ in the path that leads through struggle, at times
through pain, into new life, we pray.
God in your mercy, **Hear our Prayer.**