

April 28, 2013
5th Sunday of Easter

SMELLY GENUINE IMITATORS OF CHRIST

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Ephesians 4:25 *So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another.*

Ephesians 5:2 *and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

We who have heard the good news and experienced freedom through Christ are responsible to proclaim it to others still enslaved by sin. Are we doing all we can to make sure that people get the message?

There is a tremendous urgency when it comes to allowing the Holy Spirit to help you Love your Neighbor as Yourself. The Holy Spirit helps us overcome any lackadaisical attitudes by giving us a wholehearted motivation to demonstrate and be imitators of Christ love. One of the reasons children, youth and the unchurched are vital to 21st Century Discipleship is because they are eager to experience the love of Jesus and the joy that can only be found through the Holy Spirit. They have not become "set in their ways". Because these groups are out there searching and wandering, we, yes, we United Methodist Christians need to begin focusing on telling the story of the Gospel right now. But by whose authority do we carry out this mission? What right do we have to disrupt others' lives with the Good News of Jesus Christ?

Jesus gave us the authority and ability. **John 13:34-35** *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.* Each one of us is called right now to make disciples for Christ. It is by His authority and will that we do all we do for the glory of the Kingdom.

So what are we commissioned to do? We are to become **SMELLY GENUINE IMITATORS OF CHRIST.**

Let's take a look at the word Genuine Imitation - "Genuine imitation" is an oxymoron – a combination of two words whose meanings don't go together well or even contradict one another. Examples – jumbo shrimp, fresh frozen, bad luck,

ham steak or real magic.

Today's Scripture reading encourages us to engage in genuine imitation. "Be imitators of Christ." Here we have an invitation, a challenge to a unique kind of genuine imitation, the imitation of Christ, love, as Christ loved us.

We are commissioned to do what Christ did and then we are to do it. Mostly what Christ does is love us. Keep company with Christ and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. We are to love one another like that.

Loving like God has a lot to do with our speaking, our words. We are to strive for words that give grace. Words that empower. Words that first do no harm nor oppress. We want each word to be a gift; say only what helps. Words matter, and we need to be diligent and deliberate in their delivery.

Genuine imitation of Jesus means: "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you." "Be gentle with one another, sensitive." Again, pretty challenging words for us, especially in a culture that seems enamored with toughness and competitiveness. Maybe we need to be able to discover what it means to love fiercely and gently and to cultivate a tough tenderness.

Be genuine imitators of Christ. I have been thinking about their context in 21st Century Christianity and what is its impact on a community, like ours. These words were written to a Jesus community long ago, but these words are still true as we hear them in a Jesus community called Salem, Wisconsin. We hear them as a worshipping community, and any time two or more of us are gathered together, we are to remind ourselves of Christ's love. Worshipping together matters because it reminds us regularly of God's love and of the challenge we have to love like that. One of the great gifts of community is to give us "a sense of the possible," and worship gives us a sense of what is possible with a God who loves us and wants to love the world through us.

Community also matters because here we can work on loving with each other. Jesus said, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." With these empowering words we can be gentle with each other, sensitive, kind. We will help each other learn what it means to love like God so that when we leave our worship service, we

can continue in Christ love.

Be genuine imitators of Christ. There is nothing fake or cheap or tawdry about that. It is the challenge of a lifetime. It is our challenge together.

If we love like Jesus, we will begin to take on the aroma or the odor of Jesus.

There was a woman or a man that was always the friend but never was the girl or boyfriend. Someone suggested that they get some cologne that would make them smell nice and they would get a boyfriend or girl friend. Both wore too much and when they went out on a date they were always asked, “what’s that awful smell?”

You see we try to do a lot of things to make ourselves look and smell good to other people.

Cologne and perfume companies love to sign celebrities because they know that people will buy that fragrance just because they think that celebrity is wearing it. Last year alone celebrity scents brought in 6.8 billion dollars. Why are we so caught up in trying to imitate these celebrities?

We spend so much time and money worrying about how we smell to the world that we put off worrying about how we smell to Christ.

Christ imitation is everything. Christ not only wants you to learn to love like him. He wants you to have a fragrance that is spiritually pleasing.

Ephesians 5:2-6 - *and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

God calls Christ death a fragrant offering. You will smell good to God when you are putting on Jesus scent. A person with Jesus’s scent is someone who is not putting on the things of this world. You aren’t focused on smelling like a celebrity, you are focused on taking on the scent of Christ. He was pure. He was without sin. He was perfect in every way. Remember **Romans** says, “Do not conform to be like the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Once you become a disciple of Christ, you are to strive to no longer imitate the world.

Oh you can do things to dress it up and make it smell good for a short time, but after a while those clothes wear out and the cologne wears off, and you are left with the truth. But when you look and smell like the Character of Christ, that is a

fragrance that is not only pleasing to our Creator but will be contagious to the people around you.

The only scent that last for eternity is God's scent.

So how do you look? Are you putting on the things of the world or are you putting on the character of Christ? How do you smell? Look to your right – ask your neighbor do you have the fragrance of Jesus? Now turn to your pew neighbor on the left and ask - did you put on the fragrance of God this morning, are you a smelly genuine imitator of Christ?

Take a good whiff – Oh taste and see that that Lord is good.

A lot of times what happens is that we sit and listen to messages like these and we think, “it's not that big of a deal if I sin a little.”

When you think like that, then all you are doing is justifying your actions. It's not a big deal when I put on a little cologne of the world. But the problem is we don't realize we put on too much and then we just stink. And that goes with our day-to-day lives. You may think that some of these things aren't that big of a deal. Maybe some of them aren't in the beginning, but once you grab a little dab - more than likely a little just isn't going to be enough. Pretty soon you have put on so much more of the world that you now stink and you are no longer a child of God. You are back to being like the world.

Non Christian- God wants to forgive you no matter how bad you stink.

Christian- God wants to forgive you even if you fall back to living like the world.

Imitation is everything. From the look to the smell we are to imitate Christ. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that we can truly be an authentic representation of the power of God. Now notice I did not say substitute. We never were called to substitute for Christ.

So how do we become authentic smelly genuine imitators of Jesus? Pursue God; Live as dearly loved children; live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

The Good News is God is calling each one of us to be extra ordinary. God is calling us not to be cheap replicas of plastic and particleboard but Authentic

Imitators.

Do you smell like the blood of the risen Jesus? Are you a smelly genuine imitator of Christ?

Amen. Amen. Amen.

References:

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