

## Pentecost XI

2 Sam 18: 5-9, 14, 31-33 Psalm 130 **Eph 4: 25 – 5: 2** John 6: 35, 41-51

Over the last two Sundays in our Old Testament lessons we have been following the life journey of King David.

I want to take a turning today into the New Testament reading as I think it has much to say to us in our current context both nationally and in our immediate community.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is different from many of the other letters he wrote that feature in the New Testament. He wrote it in about 62AD from prison, which perhaps makes it all the more remarkable. From the probably challenging and harsh conditions of a Roman prison he writes lyrically in addressing lofty and uplifting themes to his audience. That audience, the church in Ephesus, was located in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) and its membership was primarily Gentile.

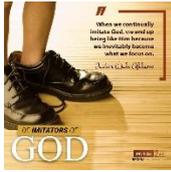


Like the letter to the church in Rome, Ephesians was not written so much to address problems in a particular church like most of Paul's other letters, but to explain some of the great themes and doctrines of Christianity.

The Letter to the Romans focuses more on God's work in an individual Christian believer, while Ephesians covers the great themes of God's work in the church, the community of believers.

In a remarkable move, perhaps, Paul calls his audience, and therefore us, to nothing less than a life of imitating God (5:1). Such a call may seem absurd, perhaps overwhelming. To suggest that we could "imitate God" might feel like the height of arrogance.

However, this call to imitation is not based on us and our resources, a theme on which I touched last Sunday when talking about forgiveness. Rather, it is founded on the love of Christ for us and the work of God, the Holy Spirit in us.



Jesus himself was and is the footsteps of God through this world. He does not simply give us an example to follow by our own will and through our own strength and determination, but rather, he walks ahead of us individually and corporately, cutting the path for us and then “pulling us along” if you like.



If you have ever walked in wet, sinking beach sand or perhaps in deep snow, you will know what I am talking about. It can be very hard and tiring trudging, so it is hugely helpful to walk in the footsteps of someone who walked ahead of you.

We are not goaded and threatened into following in Jesus' footsteps, trying to step where he has stepped, but we follow as those who are “loved into” walking this path. We imitate Jesus by choice and by grace.

It is significant that the imperative in Ephesians 5:1 indicates that this imitation is an on-going process. We might translate that phrase “*Therefore be imitators of God,*” (Ch 5 v. 2) as “Keep on becoming imitators of God ... ” in essence, “Keep on keeping on”, because God is at work to shape the church, to form us, into a people who actually inhabit the new reality described in this text. Verse 2 of Chapter 5 is reminiscent of these words of Martin Luther:

*“This life, therefore, is not godliness but the process of becoming godly, not health but getting well, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not now what we shall be, but we are on the way. The process is not yet finished, but it is actively going on. This is not the goal, but it is the right road. At present, everything does not gleam and sparkle, but everything is being cleansed.”* -

(“Defense and Explanation of All the Articles”, transl. Charles M. Jacobs, in *Luther's Works, Volume 34* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 24)

Having said that, I want to read the lesson from Ephesians again from a contemporary translation, so listen and hold in your mind and heart that this is describing you:

### **Ephesians 4:25-5:2 from *The Message***

<sup>25</sup> What this adds up to, then, is this: No more lies, no more pretense. Tell your neighbour the truth. In Christ's body we are all connected to each other, after all. When you lie to others, you end up lying to yourself.

<sup>26-27</sup> Go ahead and be angry. You do well to be angry—but do not use your anger as fuel for revenge. And do not stay angry. Do not go to bed angry. Do not give the Devil that kind of foothold in your life.

<sup>28</sup> Did you use to make ends meet by stealing? Well, no more! Get an honest job so that you can help others who cannot work.

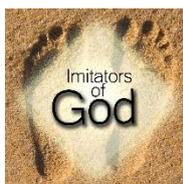
<sup>29</sup> Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift.

<sup>30</sup> Do not grieve God. Do not break God's heart. The Holy Spirit, moving and breathing in you, is the most intimate part of your life, making you fit for Godself. Do not take such a gift for granted.

<sup>31-32</sup> Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you.

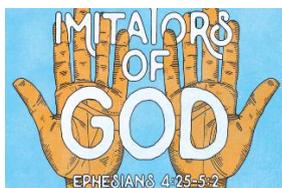
### **Wake Up from Your Sleep**

**5** <sup>1-2</sup> Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behaviour from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with God and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He did not love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.



I began by saying that this text has much to say to us in our current context. I say that because as followers of The Way, we are Keepers of the Story and practitioners of the Good News of God's love. You don't have to look very far to find someone who desperately wants and/or needs what we have. As William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury during WWII years allegedly said:

"The Church is the only organisation *that does not exist for itself, but for those who live outside of it.*" – William Temple



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