

Therefore Be Imitators of God, as Beloved Children

Sermon for the 3rd Sunday in Lent

Sermon Text: Ephesians 5:1-8



Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ³ But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴ Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. ⁵ For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ

and God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore do not become partners with them; ⁸ for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

“Why can’t you be like my father?” the annoyed wife says. “Why can’t you be a little more like your brother Stefan?” the mother of a naughty boy says. Words such as these are simply hurtful. They demand change and are at the same time only an acknowledgement that the person has given up any hope of change. It’s like a person declaring a cold war on the person with whom they are talking. Even already as children we know when we are being compared to the nice neighborhood kids, or when our poor grades are compared to our siblings’ grades. No! Such comparisons are totally inappropriate!

And yet Paul also makes this comparison in our sermon text for today. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children! But now I really perk up my ears. Paul compares us not with some special person, but with God Himself. “My dear Paul! Isn’t that a bit ambitious?” And don’t we also know of bad examples that did exactly what Paul calls for here... namely wanting to be like God? Yes, that’s what Adam and Eve wanted! And it didn’t have a good ending at all. Quite the opposite! The whole mess that we’re in today stems from that! And to this day, there are people who want to repeat Adam and Eve’s mistake by wanting to play God as they take on authority over life and death. It’s quite clear that trying to be like God has an alarming flip side. On this flip side, God is not at all the focus as the author and source of life. Instead, the person wants to make himself like God. And that doesn’t end well. No matter what form these attempts take. For some people, good works are the main purpose of all their dealings. The high mountain of moral behavior is everything to these people. The person should climb high on this mountain so that he can finally reach God. Out of pure effort and under his own strength, the person

tries to work his way up to God. The high mountain I'm talking about is the moral life. Paul spoke about three examples of moral life in our sermon text. He addressed **sexuality**, **possessions**, and **gossip** about other people. If we consider these things for ourselves, we could certainly decide that we want to do everything properly. And then it's just a matter of doing the right thing. The history of mankind is a long history of struggling against such things. So some have abstained from every form of sexuality so that they wouldn't be tempted. What resulted from this were perversions and abuse behind closed doors. Still others tried to give up all possessions so that they could come closer to God. And in doing so, they became legalistic and uptight. Again, others tried with great effort to avoid laughter, happiness, and generally all words that could somehow distract from God. What resulted had nothing to do with God. The people became warped. They expressed God's praise but with cold hearts. Something like this is terrible. Better to curse like a sailor than say a pious word from an indifferent heart! Because such hypocrisy is a distortion of all that God is. Naturally it is relatively easy to look good in public. Until the moment when the most terrible things are brought to light. Something like that is sick and is not a life of God! No, what Paul means here is something completely different. Above all the demands is namely this inscription, which defines it all:

"walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

In all we do, Christ always comes first. He doesn't ask us to give up worldly joys so that we can scale the great mountain of morality and get to heaven. No, the path goes in the other direction with our Lord Jesus: from heaven to earth. And Jesus Himself goes this way. Jesus Himself lays His riches and His glory on the sacrificial altar so that we can have some. And that's why we know that we have everything from Him and can now live in Him. To be honest: only through Jesus Christ do we receive a completely different relationship also to the worldly things, of which Paul then also speaks. Without Christ, we are left alone in our sexuality. Then all that remains is for us to use others as objects for our pleasure and throw the person away afterwards. The person who lives his sexuality without God becomes a miserable figure. First, he wants to consume the other out of greed. In the end, he consumes himself in the process. It is the same with the good things God gives us. Without Christ, they deteriorate. And these things often deteriorate precisely when we have them in abundance: People are standing in a long line at 5:00 AM.... What are they waiting for? Not a new film, not for tickets to a soccer game or to a concert either. No, it's for the very latest iPhone 13. And when they have it, they aren't responsive anymore. The whole face has disappeared with heart and soul into the 5 cm glass surface. They text and send WhatsApps all over the world and can no longer see the friendly people next door or nature! They have received a super new means of communication, but in the process their communication becomes unhealthy. Unapproachable. It's the same with other things too. We can afford a lot. We stuff the fridge full with enough food to feed an army. Only to throw away most of the food afterwards. We elevated the dogma of economic growth and thereby don't realize that we afford more for ourselves at the cost of others. And meanwhile, we lose our souls. And where the soul is destroyed, the person reaches out and wants to drag others along into the abyss. Our words are like poisonous arrows that hurt and destroy others. It can't be otherwise. Because from nothing comes nothing. Without Christ and His forgiveness, everything we do is like nuclear waste. It constantly produces only injustice.

How will we ever get off of this treadmill? Giving up being on your phone during Lent doesn't do it; just as it doesn't help much if we don't eat meat during Lent. A firm decision to live better in the future is as sure as the punctuality of a train in a snowstorm. Again and again our resolutions end up in the garbage. No, instead of willpower and resolutions, Paul wants us to be consciously aware of Christ in our

everyday lives. Without Him, we are lost. With Him, we have all the requirements to finally become free. Right where it is most needed. And right where I have my own personal need. And this Christ didn't give us this or that so that we can live better. No, we live because He gave Himself. And He not only gave us better morals or a few other things, but our whole life. ***He bought us. Not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious Blood and with His innocent suffering and death.*** We all live from this sacrifice and only because of this can we live at all! Paul doesn't at all want to tell us: "Do it like Jesus!" Rather he wants to show us that in the light of Jesus, we can radiate His love. It's similar to the beautiful stained-glass windows in our church. At night, we just see a black wall where the windows are. That's how we are without Christ. But when Jesus comes to us with His light, our whole life shines bright with His love. And in Jesus it is possible to be freer from all the things that otherwise weigh us down. As Paul describes it elsewhere: "being well-fed and hungry" I can both "live in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength!" (Phil. 4:12-13).

Now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.

Amen.