

3/17/2019

“Imitating”

Scripture: Philippians 3:17-4:1

Sermon Series: With All Your Heart

Celtic Christianity Sunday

Theme: As we return to God with all our heart, we follow the good example of Jesus and others who lead us.

The Apostle Paul wrote to early Christian believers in Philippi . . .

“Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!” Philippians 3:17-4:1 (NIV)

† **Sadly, the world around us has more than enough bad examples to follow.**

It seems like every week or two, someone else whom many have looked up to, admired, or even followed in one way or another, seems to fall from their place of high esteem. Whether it be in the world of entertainment, politics, or some other area of social life. And those in positions of religious or spiritual leadership are no exception.

Even those who report the so-called news, from one perspective or another, are not exempt from human weaknesses and failure.

I believe most or all of us would agree that how we live in our personal, professional, work and social lives matters. Yet, we know that work ethics and personal values often go hand in hand. You may have seen recent scandals in the news from an actor who allegedly “staged” or set up an attack on himself, claiming it a racial and anti-homosexual hate crime; or a group of parents who allegedly paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to fraudulently get their children in colleges of their choice. And let us sadly remember the

example of the most recent radical extremist who is suspected in videotaping the murder of forty nine people in two different mosques in New Zealand last week.

On a lighter side . . . as I was browsing through my more “personal” friends and family Facebook posts on Friday, I found one pretty funny. It’s from a close old friend of my son, who owns an auto repair shop. It reads:

McCormick's Garage is looking to hire an experienced auto mechanic. Must have valid driver’s license (and) your own tools. Virginia State Inspectors license a plus; if you do not have one must be able to get within 90 days. Please do not apply if you oversleep, have court often, do not have a baby sitter every day, have to get rides to work later then our work day begins, experience flat tires or dead batteries every week, have to hold on to a cell phone all day, or become an expert at your job with no need to learn or take advice after the first day. Must be able to talk and work at the same time. Must also remember that work still continues after lunch. Should not expect to receive gold stars for being on time.” ☺

Yes, work can be demanding, or even just a bit more than some are used to, at times. I do believe we all need some time to relax and unwind from the day to day routines and stresses of life. But the way or ways in which we do that can also make the difference in the real quality of life we have now and the direction we are heading in.

We can watch TV and movies, but who are the examples, both characters portrayed, and the actors and actresses themselves, who we like to watch? We might like to watch sports? Why do we find actors, characters, athletes or others appealing? Do we somehow want to be like them? Do their good qualities appeal to us? Or perhaps, we can relate to their human faults and learn from their mistakes we see?

And I believe we all know that with the use of things like the internet and social media, we can become more connected with others in both positive and negative ways.

Yes, the world around us has more than enough bad examples to follow. But the good news is there are good ones as well! In fact, I believe they far outweigh the bad ones, though we don’t usually hear much about them in the news.

† **As believers in Jesus, we live as citizens of heaven, even while here on earth.**

The need for good examples to follow is especially important in our walk of Christian faith as followers of Jesus Christ. In the time of the early church, the Apostles were seen as most reflecting the light and teachings of Jesus. And the Apostle Paul, not one of the original twelve close disciples of Jesus, was called and sent by the resurrected Christ to

bring the gospel even to the Gentiles. He sensed and expressed a great need, especially among the Gentiles - those not of the Jewish faith - who converted to Christianity, in the Greek city of Philippi.

Now Philippi was a metropolitan center in Macedonia, the home of Alexander the Great and Phillip his father. It had become a stop on the main roads between East and West in the Roman Empire. Worship of pagan gods, gluttony, drunkenness, rampant immoral sexual behavior were commonplace in Philippi.

There were also some Jews who believed in Jesus, who also believed it necessary for men to be circumcised according to the Hebrew Law, in order to be received into the Christian church. You can imagine that didn't go over well with grown men.

So, Paul sent word to the Philippian believers first asking them to be of the same mind, having the same love and humility that was in Jesus Christ (2:1-5). Then Paul encourages them to join in imitating him. ***“Brothers and sisters,”*** the NRSV reads, ***“join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us.”***

So, what is the example Paul describes for us?

First, he expounds upon that example by contrast. . . . **not as enemies, but as friends of the cross of Christ.**

Speaking of enemies of Christ's cross, he says (v. 19 NIV): ***“Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.”***

- “Their end is destruction” (of themselves and others)
- “their god is their stomach” . . . eating and drinking in excess, even making a mockery out of Holy Communion
- “their glory is their shame” . . . the delight in being known for shameful actions

Do any examples of such living come to your mind?

Maybe we are all just a bit guilty when it comes to one or more of these sins: when we overindulge or place anything above love for God and others. I know I could do better when it comes to eating too much or not the healthiest choices. And that wouldn't be as bad if I spent more time exercising regularly.

Then too, many people don't take time, or enough of it regularly, for God. We can become just as spiritually out of shape, run down, even sick or unhealthy if we don't

spend time with God. And, as often with physical health and wellbeing, it helps to have a good example, a coach, a mentor or a friend or group of friends who have the same values, goals and practices as we have or desire.

For early Christians, and even for most up through this past century in this country at least, that meant going to church regularly, getting in the habit of daily prayers for meals and other times, spending time weekly or more often in prayer and scripture reading with family.

I believe the point here is not a lifestyle of rigid restriction and unreasonable conformity, but one of simple humility, concern for the welfare of ourselves and others, moderation and sobriety, and glorying in the love and grace of God.

And this is possible, I believe Paul is saying, because as he puts it . . . “ . . . *our citizenship is in heaven.*” Yes, as believers in Jesus, we live as citizens of heaven, even while here on earth!

He goes on to say: “*And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*”

Now, the implication Paul most likely makes is that of the Second Coming of Christ in glory, when believers both living and dead will be raised in glory. But the process of sanctification, or being made completely holy in Christ, begins here on earth. Of this both the apostles John and Paul and others wrote; and John Wesley and others have written and preached as well. It is a process of personal transformation to the glory of God. This process begins at baptism and continues throughout our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And if we seek to change and transform society and our world for the better, we must seek and pray for transformation to take place within ourselves.

† **We can stand firm in our faith, because we have Jesus Christ and others as examples to follow.**

As Paul says (4:1 NIV): “*Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!*”

Standing firm in your faith and walk with Jesus may need to be done amidst peer pressure at school, work or elsewhere. Sometimes temptation and pressure is felt by those we are

closest to, whether family or friends. Standing firm in the Lord may bring discord and strife at first. We do not confront evil with evil. But, sometimes we need to confront evil with loving concern and steadfast love.

The good news is that we can stand firm in our faith, remembering and looking to Jesus who is *“the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.”* (Hebrews 12:2 NIV)

We can stand firm in our faith, because we have the examples of Peter, James, John, and other apostles including Paul, who being filled with the Holy Spirit, were led to follow Christ in this life. We can stand firm in our faith, because so many others came after them, including Saint Patrick, who lived in Christ and shared the good news to so many more. We can stand firm in our faith, because of those of family, friends, or church who have been or are still good examples for us today. And we can stand firm in our faith, because by the Holy Spirit, Christ is still with us and within us! Remember your call to live in the Way that is abundant and eternal life. Watch and join those who do! Your life will be blessed beyond measure!

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Questions for Reflection:

Have you been tempted to live “by the flesh”, with your mind “set on earthly things”, even at times as an “enemy of the cross”? How so?

Have you considered yourself to be a citizen of heaven while here on earth? What does that mean to you? How does it make a difference in your thoughts, feelings, and actions?

How does your life in Christ and the Holy Spirit help you to stand strong in your faith? How have or does the example of others helped as well?