

Rev. Dan Welch Pentecost 12
8-12-18 Text- Ephesians 4:17- 5:2

What is your favorite smell?
How about your least favorite? On the positive side maybe you especially enjoy the smells of certain foods like freshly baked bread, a roast or a cake in the oven or could it be... bacon! Maybe you prefer the scent of fresh flowers like roses, or perhaps you especially enjoy a scented candle like lilac or peach. Some people like the smell of a newborn baby. Although with babies, you also have some unpleasant smells. Personally, I can't relate because I have practically no sense of smell, which is why when our kids were little I had more than my fair share of diaper duty!

What a wonderful blessing the sense of smell is! There are so many things in God's creation to enjoy. The sense of smell also protects us from ingesting or inhaling things that are harmful to us, like rotten food, exhaust fumes, and other noxious chemicals.

The sense of smell is actually talked about quite a bit in the Bible. The first time it appears is right after the worldwide flood when Noah offered his sacrifice to God after he and his family came safely out from the ark. He built an altar. Then, as we read in Genesis chapter 8, "He sacrificed burnt offerings on it. (and) The Lord smelled the pleasant

aroma." Later on in Genesis we read about how the aged and blind Isaac smelled the garments that his son Jacob had on and thought it was Jacob's older brother Esau, so Jacob received his father's blessing.

Sacrifices described in the Old Testament book of Leviticus many times end with the words "an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord" (Lev. 1:9). Skipping ahead to the New Testament, St. Paul describes the offerings that the Christians at Philippi gave for the work of the Gospel as a "fragrant offering."

But we need to go one step farther. In the closing words of our Epistle lesson today we hear about the best example of all: Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross is called... a fragrant offering. Jesus' loving sacrifice for us was one that was completely acceptable to His Father in heaven. And, even though it may sound strange, **we** too can be a sweet smell to the Lord.

Are we a sweet smell to God, though? In our Epistle lesson today, Paul warns us about many things to avoid such as falsehood, anger, stealing, unwholesome talk, bitterness, slander, and so on. These things are definitely not a sweet smell to the Lord. Unfortunately, our lives **are** filled with such spiritual odors. At times we tell untruths and even live untruths. We put on an act

to cover sin or weakness. All too often we speak in words that tear down, hurt, and damage reputations. We can easily get bitter about life and our situation in it. Bitterness breeds anger against others and against God when things do not go our way. These are not sweet smells to the Lord, but offensive, sour, and obnoxious odors to Him.

“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God...” This is a huge warning to us. The Holy Spirit is working in our hearts as Christians to mold us into the image of Christ, shape us, and even make us a sweet smell to the Lord. We grieve the Holy Spirit when He works in our hearts to speak kind words, and we instead criticize and speak evil. We grieve Him when He works in us peace, and we allow some care in this life, some problem, some worry, to shatter our trust in God. We grieve Him when He shows us how to live a forgiving, tenderhearted life with others, and we choose to live a life of vengeance. We grieve the Holy Spirit when follow the example of this sinful world instead of listening to the Word of God. With this in mind, we become all too aware that we are **not** always a sweet smell to the Lord. Much of what we do is an offensive odor to Him, even though as Christians we know better. The bottom line is this: because of our

sins, we truly are a bunch of stinkers to God!

How can we be a sweet smell to the Lord, then? The Apostle Paul tells us: “As Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (v.2). Remember, the Old Testament sacrifices were a pleasing aroma to the Lord. But, they only pointed ahead to the sacrifice that would be made, a sacrifice, once and for all, for all people. Our Savior Jesus loved us and was the sacrifice for us. He would pay for our sins. On that first Good Friday, on that hill, on that cross, as His blood was shed, as He died there, that sacrifice would bring about the forgiveness of all sins, of all people everywhere, including your sins and mine.

Paul wrote, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice” (v.31). Christ was sacrificed to rid us of these things. He **conquered** these things, our sins, on the cross. He got rid of them for us by taking them off our hearts and minds and souls. The sins of the world have been conquered. No wonder this sacrifice was such a sweet smell, a fragrant offering to the Lord!

Because of Christ we are offerings, our very lives are a sweet smell to the Lord. The strong, beautiful aroma of Christ’s perfect

sacrifice covers over the odor of all our sins before God the Father. We live our lives through faith in the sacrifice that Christ made for us. They are lives cleansed from sin. He lives in us, and we are His people. It is a life of faith in Him Who was the sacrifice of our sin and rose again for us on the third day. Our faith is in Christ alone. We have opportunity after opportunity to grow in that faith. Each time we come to the Lord's Supper and each time we hear or read the Word of God, our faith is strengthened.

But there's more. Paul teaches us ways to please our God. Now that we are His children, baptized, forgiven, awaiting full eternal life in Christ, we live in this world in new ways. "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love." Because of Christ our lives are offered up to God as living sacrifices and fragrant offerings to God. When we forgive another in Christ-like forgiveness, when we show love to others, then this is a sweet smell to the Lord. When we are Christ-like in our sacrificial love, our compassion, our acts of kindness, when we know Him so well through the Word that we **imitate** His love and forgiveness, then we are a sweet smell to the Lord. He works all this in us through

the grace He gives through Word and Sacraments.

So yes, our lives **are** sweet and fragrant offerings to God. But it's only because of the sweet-smelling sacrifice of Jesus Christ for us on the cross. His sacrifice made it possible for us to be living sacrifices to our God. That means we live lives **imitating** Christ who loved us! What does that look like? Here's one example:

A missionary found himself in an out- of the-way Chinese town, and to the crowd that gathered around him, he told the story of Jesus. As he proceeded he noticed how especially close the people were paying attention to him. When he finished, one of the men said, "Yes, we know Him, He used to live here." The missionary explained that he had been talking about One who lived in another century, and in another town. Then they took him to a cemetery and showed him the grave of an English medical missionary, who a few years before had served and healed and died there. They had known Christ. He had touched them through the Gospel of that missionary's life.

We are called to live as imitators of God. Our Lord Jesus Christ has made us a sweet smelling offering to the Lord. With faith in Christ, listening to the Holy Spirit as He speaks to us in His Word, and

imitating our Savior, we are a sweet
smelling sacrifice to the Lord. Amen.