

Have you ever noticed how much we learn in life by imitating others? For example this past week when I saw the car in front of me at the intersection of 13th and Hennepin successfully swerve to miss a pot hole, you can bet I **imitated** them and the path they drove in order to not get a flat-tire, bent wheel rim, or even lose a hub cap! Be careful out there!

Well, children learn a lot about life and about growing up by imitating their parents. As Rodney Atkins memorably sings it: "I've been watching you, dad, ain't that cool!" Yes, children learn a lot by imitating their dads and moms; sometimes to their parents' delight and sometimes to their parents' embarrassment! (I think we all have our stories there!)

God, our heavenly Father certainly wants us to imitate Him, but He also wants us to imitate our big brothers and sisters in the faith. Who is it in your life that has influenced you? Who have you looked up to as a Christian and patterned yourself after? A parent, grandparent, teacher, friend, a neighbor? Because we have the tendency to look to others for guidance, in our Epistle lesson today, Paul points us to look to solidly grounded Christians and He tells us to imitate them.

God calls us to faith through His Word. He has promised never to abandon us. And He doesn't leave us on our own in our walk with Him, either. God gives us the examples of others. These are gifts to help **cultivate** in us the mind of Christ, that is, to help us "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" as Peter puts it in 2 Peter 3:18.

In our text this morning Paul calls on us to be **co**-imitators of Christ. We imitate Christ, Paul, and other faithful witnesses of Christ **together**, as part of the congregation of God's people.

In the Garden of Eden, God saw that it wasn't good for man to be alone. This still holds true for us. He wants us to be there to support one another, to encourage one another. He wants us to be modeling life for one another in the congregation of His people. And being **co**-imitators is especially important when we run into tough times in our lives. Paul had his shipwrecks, beatings, and imprisonments for the Gospel. In our lives we have our own setbacks, hardships, and difficulties that bring us down; things that maybe even bring us to tears. As we heard last Wednesday evening God sees the things we struggle with, just like He saw how the Israelites were harshly treated in Egypt, and out of His great compassion God acts for His people. God knows your tears and His desire is to comfort you!

Speaking of tears, part of Paul's example that he puts forward in **this** text is learning to shed tears for those who are enemies of the cross of Christ- those who despise Christ. People who live their lives thinking only of themselves. People who do evil toward others. Yes, Paul calls on us to imitate Him in shedding tears for those who are enemies of the cross of Christ. Not in anger, indignation, or disgust, although we may have these feelings towards those who hurt us and other Christians. No, Paul's tears were shed in outright sorrow from the people whose god was there belly.

The enemies of the cross, Paul says, glory in their own shame. They conceive of reality and live their lives in such a way that it brings them down into the gutter. And Paul tells us our minds should be in the clouds. Our minds should be fixed on that heavenly citizenship, that heavenly society in which God cultivates us as He gives us rebirth in our baptism and as He renews that new life in us as the Holy Spirit brings us the Word of life.

When we look at reality from God's point of view and the Holy Spirit leads us into looking at the world in such a way that we can't understand how people can try to find their identity in and security in and meaning in the pleasures of this life and ignore all the signs that they riding a fast track to their own destruction. That in itself is enough to make a grown Christians weep. And those tears flow from the eyes and the mind of people who have been freed by Christ's death and resurrection, who have been freed to imitate Jesus and to imitate Paul

Jesus not only cried when Lazarus died (John 11), He also cried over Jerusalem (Luke 19), over those who were about to crucify Him. He wept in sadness as He looked to the prospect of what was facing those people for **whom** He was dying but who would **remain** enemies of the cross.

Our world today seems to specialize in inventing new ways to oppose the cross of Christ as a way of life for human beings, as society drifts further and further from God's plan laid out for us in His Word. And our temptation naturally is to get defensive and get mad at people who oppose Christ, who openly mock Him and His followers. We want to show them who's boss. But we don't need to. The Boss will. He has shown us who is Lord. He has shown us who is in charge.

The Lord has placed you and me on His good earth for so many important purposes. One of which is to weep for our enemies, as Paul did. And to pray that through His Holy Word and Holy Baptism, God will have the **perfect** vengeance on our enemies.... and turn them into peoplewho are **just like us!**

People who are disciples of the cross, bowing at His cross, and people who now see reality from a heavenly point of view!

So as we repent again today for not always imitating Paul, that is, in crying **enough** for the enemies of the cross (and praying for them and reaching out to them), we look to the **Lord**. We continue to praise His name and we continue to pray that His enemies will become just like us- citizens of heaven, all for the sake of our Lord Jesus who died **on** the cross and rose again for us and for the life of the whole world! Amen