

Therefore, be imitators of God

Monkey see, monkey do, monkey get in trouble too! Did you ever hear this expression or were reminded of its truth at some time or other in your youth? Perhaps even to a greater degree as you matured?

One day, my fifth-grade class had a substitute teacher. Several classmates huddled together before the school day began and planned a “surprise” for the supply instructor. Word made its way to most of the kids prior to the ringing of the bell that signaled everyone was to be seated for announcements and then the Pledge of Allegiance. At 10:00, collectively, 25 pencils (my own included) dropped to the floor and a scrambling of chairs being pushed back to retrieve the writing instruments from where they had rolled, disrupted the math lesson. Pretty funny, huh? Even funnier was that recess time was spent in our seats with the lights off... I sweated much of the afternoon wondering what my dad would say if Mrs. Gibbs shared this juvenile escapade with him...not always easy being a daughter of the school principal and having your mom as the sub for the day...

This silly antic, wasn't, of course, earth shattering, but I surely wasn't acting as a beloved child. There are other tales I could tell on myself, mimicking the conduct of the “in crowd”, allowing myself to be caught up in the moment. Maybe that's true for you, too? And not all of them as a “youthful offender”.

In keeping with the theme of “school”, Paul, in the reading from Ephesians today, educates us as he did the Ephesians.

The goal of a Christian-or Jesus Follower's life, is to imitate God. What are we doing when we imitate God? We're doing what we're designed to do-made in God's image, to do our best to exemplify His most perfect love. Of course, because we're human, mortal, we are not, cannot, dare not, BE him. Using Jesus' lifestyle and worldly presence as examples, and receiving the gift and counsel of the Holy Spirit, our relationship with our creator grows and deepens enabling each of us, as beloved children, to imitate the life-giving, loving kindness shown to us.

In Chapter 5, vs 2, we're instructed to live in love-in some bible versions, the word walk is used rather than live-in any event, the idea is the same. It is a walk, with our earthly companions, human and otherwise, not a sprint to the finish line. It's daily living, abiding in peace with all that was created. Occasional, when it's convenient, what's it gonna hurt, keep up with the Jones's, fit in with the crowd, status quo behavior isn't what the Gospel is about. Take a moment to look at or think about what Paul shared in today's epistle. Does anything sound familiar? A hint relating to the 10 Commandments? It's not simply mimicking good, right or proper behavior to gain points for admission to heaven or to be perceived by God and others as a righteous person.

Might living/walking in love require the “lover” to develop and practice empathy? We learn to walk; we aren't born on our feet! Empathy calls one to “walk a mile in another's shoes”.

Following in Jesus' footsteps to help bring about Beloved Community requires perseverance and forgiveness. Many might recall the verses from Corinthians often read at weddings? Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it isn't arrogant or rude, nor does it insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoings but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. These words aren't just a lesson or instruction for those being wed. They are a guide for right living on, living in, this fragile earth, our island home. Remembering that we are in this world but not of this world is helpful.

Proverbs 31:8-9 tells us: Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and the needy. Could it be that to imitate God means that we have to die a little? You and I likely won't be called to literally sacrifice our lives for another, but we ought to remember those who are and those who have, daily. We are going to have to deny ourselves and pick up our cross if we honestly want to follow Jesus-use **HIM** as our moral compass, never mind all the rambling and babbling about politics, red/blue, left, right, liberal conservative/progressive. With God's help, as any of us has affirmed we will, on many an occasion, and welcoming the indwelling guidance and prompting of the Holy Spirit, whether a gentle nudge or inner discomfort, you and I will have the courage, let go of the fear, (be not afraid) to walk the walk, not just talk the talk. It's oftentimes hard, sorrowful, tedious work yet the joy is immense and the beauty soul deep.

Let love your legacy be, writes Bishop Steven Charleston. A power that keeps on repairing the world long after we're gone-the love you create will continue. It will answer prayer.

We are not compelled but given a choice, an invitation. What will be our response? Speaking the truth in love, laboring honestly in accordance with our gifts for the common good, sharing words of encouragement, hope, forgiveness, helping to heal, repair, and restore a broken world...these are the fragrant offerings of Love. I pray, may they be my legacy. Amen.