

Lent 2019

Stepping Stones

Week Two – *Imitating Christ*

Monday, March 18th

Jim Pierce

Last week we began our Lenten journey by going to the place where God dwells. Now that we're there, God tells us, "imitate Christ," "walk in his way."

Now obviously, "walk in his way" does not mean walk in a way that gets in Christ's way, although without much effort at all we are all pretty good at that. And it doesn't mean imitate the way Jesus walks, something we couldn't do if we tried, never having seen him.

So what might it mean to imitate Christ and walk in his way? Well, the gospels are full of suggestions about that and they all have to do with being a disciple, following where Jesus, the master, goes. Get out your Bible and skim through any of the gospels. See where Jesus goes before he goes to Jerusalem to be arrested, convicted and executed.

He walks all over Galilee, claiming and using the authority that goes with his mission from God — healing the sick, casting out demons, teaching, eating with sinners and pharisees alike — demonstrating how the Kingdom of God is breaking into this world. In doing these things he takes on the religious leaders and the devout believers who challenge him, saying, "don't get in my way, walk in my way."

What does it mean to be a disciple and walk in Jesus way? Well it doesn't mean walking ahead of him, to show him the way, as some of those early disciples tried to do on occasion by screening who could come to him. It doesn't mean walking beside him as partners and equals. It means walking behind him, watching, learning, copying, practicing, doing what we see Jesus do.

What does it mean to imitate Christ, to walk in his way? It means working to heal the sick, the broken, working with others to free them from the demons in their lives, teaching those who hunger to learn of God's love, sharing our lives and our tables not just with the pharisees of our community, our congregation but with sinners as well.

What does it mean to imitate Christ, to walk in his way? It means beginning each day's walk with the prayer that in this new day you and I might follow where Jesus leads. It means ending each day by reporting back to Jesus where we've been, what we've done, and giving thanks for his presence with us.

It means, praying the words of an old hymn still in our hymnals today, *Lord, Speak to Us, That We May Speak:*

*Lord speak to us, that we may speak in living echoes of your tone
Oh, lead us, Lord, that we may lead the wand'ring and the wavering feet
Oh teach us Lord, that we may teach the precious truths which you impart . . .*

*Oh, fill us with your fullness, Lord, until our very hearts o'er-flow
In kindling thought and glowing word, your love to tell, your praise to show.
Amen*

Lutheran Book of Worship, #403, Evangelical Lutheran Worship, #676

Tuesday, March 19th

Jeff Langdon

In Paul's letter to the church in Philippi, Paul pleads with the church to join in with others in following Paul's example...living according to a lifestyle that Paul has described for them. In this section of his letter, Paul is rounding out his exhortation for the people of God to be joyfully satisfied in the Lord Jesus.

For that early gathering in Philippi, to walk faithfully as a community shaped by the Gospel, it is absolutely necessary that Christ be the center of their hope. So Paul tells them to imitate examples of others who are worth following...to imitate the kinds of people who are satisfied in Jesus and to imitate those who hope fully in the resurrection to come.

The urgency of Paul's instruction comes from the fact that the world is filled with leaders and others who are examples of those who feed upon our human desire for instant gratification. Paul uses the words to describe them as those **whose minds are set on earthly things**... and with their earthly perspective, they are a constant threat to the health and faithfulness of God's people.

The reality is that those of us who look to this world and the seemingly immediate satisfaction it can provide are in fact working in opposition to the cross... they are in essence, enemies of the cross.

Immediate satisfaction stands in opposition to the fact that the cross comes before the crown. There is no hope in the the resurrection apart from sharing in the suffering of the cross... this is described as the "Theology of the Cross"... Christ took our place on the cross, taking our sinfulness with himself. It is our privilege in the meantime, while we wait for his return, to know and to serve him by, in Paul's words, **sharing not only in power of the resurrection, but by following the pattern of his cross ...** in order to make the gospel known and to be changed by his grace.

To do this we need faithful examples to follow...we need others who can walk before us and along side of us... to help us grow in our knowledge of God and to help us make sense of how to

walk with Christ in the world. We can not live and follow Christ alone... we are to be partners in the gospel, living with others in community. Part of walking faithfully as a community is to follow examples of those who are satisfied in Jesus, to follow those whose hope is fully in the resurrection to come.

Those who are satisfied in Jesus then are those who try to reflect Jesus... to attempt to show others what Jesus is like. Those who are satisfied in Jesus are those whose hope is in Jesus... trusting not in earthly desires, but living in community, loving in community and acting in community. Those who are satisfied in Jesus are those who acknowledge God's grace and then try to reflect God's grace in acknowledgment of the cross.

Be then imitators of Christ. Go and do justice, do mercy and walk in humility before our God, serving as examples of God's love for the world.

God, you sent your Son to be the atonement for our sins. In the cross, the work was done for us. Help us to imitate your love for us. Help us reflect Jesus in all we do. Sustain our work here with the Holy Spirit, and keep us as your own. Amen

Wednesday, March 20th

Juel Pierce

What does it mean to imitate Christ? Thomas a Kempis wrote a very famous devotional book called *The Imitation of Christ*. In it he concentrates on the interior life of Christians, and urges readers to let go of whatever keeps them focused on the world and pay attention to the ways in which Christ speaks to us in our conscience and spiritual life.

When I was the mother of young children, I wanted to be able to do that. I wanted to be able to sit in silence and listen for God's voice. It was difficult! Finding a place where I would not be interrupted was not easy. When my daughters took naps at the same time, I could count on a few moments of silence. But usually, before I was ready to emerge from the silence, hopefully renewed and with new patience, I would hear their voices, and they needed me to be with them. I eventually came to the conclusion that in whatever way I was going to imitate Christ, it mostly wasn't going to be in silence, in a quiet space, without interruption.

We read again and again in the gospels about Jesus being interrupted in prayer, by his disciples, by the crowds, by his enemies. Perhaps what we need to do to imitate Christ is to pay attention to the interruptions. What does he do? One time, when he was so tired he was able to sleep through a storm on the Sea of Galilee in the boat with his disciples, they finally woke him up to help them with the boat. He did not tell them to leave him alone. Instead he paid attention to them and their fears, and stilled the storm. Once, when his disciples thought the children who came with their parents to see him were bothering him, he paid attention to the children and blessed them.

If we want to imitate Jesus, we will not withdraw from the world around us (although there probably is a time for that). But we will listen to the needs of those around us, and do what we can to respond to those needs. Even when we are interrupted.

Lord Jesus, help us to imitate you in this Lenten season by hearing, seeing, noticing, and listening to those in need around us. AMEN.

Thursday, March 21st

Rev. Roger Lenander

Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God. – Ephesians 5:1-2

When I was being particularly obnoxious as a young teen my parents would get tired of it and tell me “your attitude stinks.” It described how my attitude was affecting everyone around me and that I was the one who was responsible for resetting my attitude. Following in the footsteps of Christ we have a model of the right attitude towards God and one another that carries us into our daily life. When we imitate the attitude of Christ we are a pleasing aroma to those around us. When we put on an attitude of pleasing one’s self alone, our aroma to others stinks. In this season of repentance pray for Jesus to lead you each day into the world with an attitude that reflects the love of Christ for the world. This is your pleasing offering to God each day in thanks for Christ who died for you so that you now live as a new person in “Christ. Study God’s Word and listen for the wisdom and teaching God has already provided from others who have gone before you that we can throw our self into the arms of God who never tires from preparing us to be a welcome fragrance to the world.

Lord, prepare my heart and mind each day to reflect your love in and through my daily encounters with people around me. Prepare me to be a vessel of your love in whatever I am asked to do and whoever I encounter. In Jesus name. Amen.

Friday, March 22nd

Misty Coyle

5 ¹⁻² Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn’t love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.

Ephesians 5:1-2 (MSG)

The last stepping stone was easier than this one! I know for myself, when I see something wrong or someone doing a hateful action, I become angry. Sometimes livid to the point I can’t sit or stand still and a few choice words may escape my lips. Then I have to remind myself, this is not how I should be. I have to stop, balance myself, and breath. I pray, and I sit on the stepping stone until God speaks or guides me the way he intended for me to respond. Again, for me this is also very hard because I want; no... I love to have control over my situations. My children’s situations. Anything that has to do with me, I want control. But to

love as Christ loves us, I have to give up that control. I have to know and act upon that love. Even though I may not understand “why” I need to love in some situations, I do know the “how” I am suppose to love in all situations.

So, sit a spell on this stepping stone and listen. Listen and then do. Remember, in Christ alone we have sure footing. Even on the really hard and slippery ones.

God, be with us. Guide us and help us to have the energy to love others as you love us. Let our hands do your work, our mouths speak of your glory, and our feet to follow your ways. Amen!