

The 11th Sunday after Pentecost
August 8, 2021

“As Christ loved His church, so walk in His love”
(Ephesians 5:1-2)
By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
Today’s text for this 11th Sunday after Pentecost is from our Epistle reading –
Ephesians 5:1-2

“Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.”

Here ends our text.

Do you like to keep tabs on the medal count of the Olympics for our country? If you do, it’s most likely because of your national pride and patriotism. When our country does well, it makes you feel good. I know it does for me. I enjoy seeing the athletes drape the American flag around their backs instead of turning their backs on the flag or burning it. Well, the U.S. is doing pretty good in the medal count. As of this morning, they have more total medals than any other country. We have 108 and the next closest country is China with 87. Twenty-one medal difference is pretty significant.

Yet, if you look at the standings, the U.S. is in 2nd place behind China in the all important count of...you guessed it... gold medals. China has 38 and the U.S. has 36. Of course, we should be pleased with 36 and there is still time to overtake China. 2nd place is better than 3rd place, right but it’s still not #1.

If you watch some of the highlights of track and field athletes who cross the finish line in 2nd or 3rd place, you often see a look of profound disappointment on their faces. In the heat of the moment, the silver or bronze finisher feels good to have received a medal, but also sad to have let down family, friends and country to not have brought home the gold. One 1st time Olympian who came in 3rd said he was glad to have a medal, but bronze is boring.

In our Christian walk, our Christian race, we are continually striving for the gold. **“Therefore, be imitators of God as dear children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us”**. With these words Paul summarizes our goal in this life, our goal to live a sanctified, holy life. Don’t let yourself strive for anything less than imitating God, and most especially His love! For to keep the law of God is to love God with all your heart, mind and soul and your neighbor as yourself.

Last week, we heard Paul in the verses that precede our epistle, tell us that God has given us all gifts for the edifying of the body of Christ, especially apostles like Paul, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. The goal as Paul told us last week is **“for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;... speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—”** (Ephesians 4:13,15)

We strive to be perfect and grow up in all things into Him, Christ! We press on for the gold, speaking the truth in love, doing our part to build each other up.

But Paul continues in today’s epistle reading with some very sobering words. The very opening words of verse 17 tell us that we need to be very diligent to not take any steps backwards.

“This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind,”

This is a real threat. The way that Paul speaks is one of absolute seriousness. “I’m telling you, and testifying in the Lord” that you don’t fall back into your old futile ways. It can happen if you get lazy in your spiritual life. Because you still have the “old man” in you! Yes, you’re children of God, dear children loved by God! But until you get to heaven, and become a perfect man in the stature of Christ, you’re in a tooth and nail fight with your old carnal self. It’s not going away. It’s going to try to drag you down, deceive you and disqualify you from the race. The “old man” in each of us wants three letters to show up next to your name – DNF. Did not finish!

What? There’s a war within me going on, even as a Christian? Yes, Paul is reminding the Ephesians and each of us that the Christian faith teaches us this truth.

“But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,” (Ephesians 4:20-22)

Put off, crucify, drown the old man, your sinful nature, that grows corrupt unless you continually, daily, repent and reject it. It’s a painful process, because the “old man” promises things that seem enjoyable but only lead to your eternal destruction.

A recently retired Olympian made this statement when asked what advice he would give to younger Olympian hopefuls. He said, “Learn how to lose, before you can win.”

Who said that? You may be surprised to know that the fastest man on earth, Usain Bolt said it. Yes, the person who holds the world records for the fastest times in the 100 and 200 meter sprints said this. He’s the only person to have won gold medals in the 100 and 200 in three consecutive Olympic games from 2008-2016.

Yet, you maybe didn’t know that he participated in the 2004 Olympic games in Athens and didn’t even qualify for the finals. Part of it had to do with him being hampered with an injury. But mostly, he freely admits that he regrets not being more serious earlier. He was a talented athlete. Winning came easy. But, when he faced other talented athletes, he didn’t have the discipline yet to make the most out of his gifts. Before he could win, he had to own his losing. He had to acknowledge it that it was real. He had to bring his whole being into strict training. And that’s when, after much hard work, the magic happened. Lightning Bolt became his nickname.

Every Christian has to learn how to lose before God makes the winning happen! Every Christian has to daily admit, acknowledge that there is an old carnal man in each of us striving to take over. Each of us needs to admit that before we were converted, we were utterly lost. Paul tells us in our epistle that we also **“should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; 19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.”**

No longer should you walk in the darkness of lewdness, lechery, and greed, in ignorance, blindness of heart, as aliens from God. Yes, we were aliens, separated

from God. And those who are still unregenerate, unbelievers are past feeling ashamed of what they do. Paul is telling us to not return to those ways. Learn how to lose – that is repent daily of the evil that you think and do and nip it in the bud.

Paul hits the big common sins that must be avoided. Don't lie or steal. You might hear someone else say "It isn't stealing if you don't get caught". And everyone is doing it. And little by little the old man in us tries to chip away at our new man that was given to us in our baptism.

“be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:23-24)

Your new self was created by God and given to you as a gift when the Holy Spirit gave you faith to believe in Jesus. You are created by God in His true righteousness and holiness. Put on the new man when you daily remember your baptism. You are indeed a dear child of God and called to walk worthy of your calling.

The old man tries to convince us that the sinful morality that we see in this world is accepted by the majority so it must be ok. An unexpected pregnancy can be fixed with an abortion. Homosexuality must be ok since it is protected by our government and everyone is praised for being courageous when they come out of the closet. Yes, you're so courageous to give in to sin, whether your homosexual or heterosexual.

Paul speaks about anger. Road rage. Violent protesting. Don't let your anger turn into terrible words and deeds or make you harbor resentment and revenge. Don't let the sun go down on your anger. Don't let the devil win and give place to him...let him take 1st place.

Don't let anything come from your lips that is not edifying. Are there worse sins than others? Well, if you allow your evil thoughts to manifest themselves in evil works then that is worse. But, the worst sin is the unrepentant sin. **“Don't grieve the Holy Spirit”**. Don't become so hardened that you reject the Holy Spirit and thus commit the unforgiveable sin of unbelief. (Matthew 12:31-32)

Paul tells us who we are. In our baptisms, we were **“were sealed for the day of redemption.” (Ephesians 4:30)**. Jesus ran the perfect race that we couldn't run. His death on the cross removed all our sins and this gift of salvation the Holy Spirit

has graciously given to us. The new man in each of us is not captive to the old man. We can and must say no to its evil desires as we look forward to the day when we will be redeemed of the old man.

The Holy Spirit is a seal which has been impressed upon us, to reassure us that we belong to God, and preserves us for our destination, unto the day of redemption, when we shall be delivered from all evil, from all corruption, also from our old man.

For now, Paul is speaking straight with us. We're in a dogfight until the end with ourselves. And so, we confess our sins daily, and as we begin each service, that yes, I have not imitated God, but have followed the old man.

And then, we hear God reminding us over and over again that He is merciful in Christ, and forgives us all our sins. **“be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32)**

Oh how great is the forgiveness of Christ. Unlimited 70 times 7 forgiveness that we lifts us up to continue in our race. Yes, that's when the magic happens as we are strengthened by the Gospel to continue forward. We run, we walk in the love that Christ has first given us. Listen how Paul concludes our text.

“walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.” (Ephesians 5:2)

All the blood, sweat and tears Jesus gave so that we would be victors. He sacrificed all, His very self and God the Father was pleased with His work. It was a sweet victory! A sweet-smelling aroma of victory! Jesus received the gold and rose from the dead to stand upon the victor's podium for all eternity.

And His victory is yours even now through faith in Him. So, Paul reminds us that we too stand will stand on the victor's podium with the crown of life upon our heads. Until then we subdue the old man, be imitators of God and live life with the true joys of salvation and eternal life which our new man experiences each and every day! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)