

**Romans 12:3-21**

**Ephesians 4:25 - 5:2**

**August 8, 2021**

*Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC*

**TO THE SAINTS IN WALLACE  
BE LIKE GOD**

***Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.***

To the saints who are in Wallace and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Have you seen the wonderful video posted by NBC Sports? It showed up on my Facebook feed this week. A little girl named Chloe, maybe three years old, is watching U.S. gold medalist gymnast Suni Lee perform her floor routine. Her mom and dad are recording their daughter but are not in the picture. Chloe carefully follows everything Suni Lee does on the big screen TV on the living room wall. She then tries her best to imitate the gymnast. Chloe includes all of the sweeping hand motions, the spins, and the tumbles with her own version of somersaults. She even has a final flourish as the floor routine comes to an end. You can hear her mom say, “Chloe, you’re doing a wonderful job!”

Chloe’s imitation of Olympian Suni Lee reminds me of *The Message* translation of Ephesians 5:1 — “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.” They say “imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.” “Imitation” in the best, most genuine sense means to behave in a similar way to someone else, to follow someone as a model. The King James Version of this same verse says, “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.” One Lutheran commentator has put it this way, “Where the life of faith is founded on the humility, gentleness, and patience of Christ, there is imitation — Christ-like behavior. This is no cheap imitation either, but the genuine article. Our faith has marked us for redemption. Living as redeemed, our lives are the real thing, not ‘knockoffs’ of the humans we would be without God. In Christ, the church has begun to resemble the creature humanity was meant to be — a humanity created in God’s image.”<sup>1</sup>

Be imitators of God — be like God — be followers of God. That sounds familiar. Remember in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount when he says, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”? (Matthew 5:48) That’s sounds pretty intimidating, impossible even! But also remember that “perfect” can mean to have an aim, a goal, to be headed toward completion. In that sense, being perfect, being imitators of God, being like God, being followers of God means a lifelong journey of faith and service and, most of all, love.

Just as Jesus does in his Sermon on the Mount, here the apostle Paul gives specific instructions about how to live as Christian followers of God in the faith community. According to my count, Paul lists at least fourteen behaviors appropriate to believers,

including such advice as: be done with the lie; speak truth with your neighbor; if you get angry, don't sin; be reconciled before the sun sets; don't steal; share with the ones who have need; if you don't have something good to say, don't say anything at all; don't disappoint God's Holy Spirit by disregarding God's call; cut out all of the anger, bitterness, shouting, and insults; but be kind, tender-hearted, forgiving; be like God; and, most of all, walk in love.

But Paul is not just giving a first-century TED talk or a motivational speech at a self-help convention. Nor is he passing out advice about "14 Easy Steps to a More Successful Life." Instead, as Paul always does, he gives instructions to his fellow believers about how to live going forward, based on what God has already done for us in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. In fact, Paul builds that Trinitarian idea into his call to a life of love. He reminds us believers that God in Christ has forgiven us, that Christ loved us and gave himself for us, and that we have been marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit. As another writer has put it, "As God's 'beloved children,' we do not just love God, praise God, worship God, thank God. We also aim to imitate God, minding and then closing the gap between God's behavior and our own. To imitate God, only one thing is needful . . . love that sacrifices for the good of others. If we get that, we get it all."<sup>2</sup>

Thirty years ago today, the first GatorAde commercial featuring Michael Jordan was broadcast. It is ranked as one of the best sports commercials ever produced. Many of you will remember the commercial because of its song:

*Sometimes I dream  
That he is me  
You've got to see that's how I dream to be  
I dream I move, I dream I groove  
Like Mike  
If I could be like Mike*

Interestingly, the commercial didn't do much for GatorAde sales, but it certainly helped Michael Jordan's image as a likeable, relatable superstar. According to one history of the marketing of the "Be Like Mike" commercial, "By including scenes of him playing basketball with children who copy his moves, Quaker was able to portray Jordan as an endearing, 'down-to-earth basketball megastar' who children wanted to emulate." One journalist wrote, "The moment where you have a Michael Jordan ad where lots of little white kids saying, 'I want to be like Mike.' That is an extraordinary, watershed moment. I don't think that was happening before."<sup>3</sup>

We could say, "I want to be like God." On its own and out of context, that is certainly an arrogant statement! However, because of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, that is exactly who we should dream to be like. Well, how in the world are we supposed to be like God without falling prey to idolatry and self-righteousness and blasphemy? One way is to go back and read the Sermon on the Mount again and seek God's kingdom and righteousness first in our lives. Another way to be like God is to "live a life worthy of the calling to which [we] have been called, with all humility and

gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:1-3)

Paul adds some more instructions to that call to a certain way of life as followers of God that we heard last Sunday. Notice the rhythm he establishes: give up stealing/share with the needy; let no evil talk come out of your mouth/only what is useful for building up; put away all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice/be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another.

If you’ve ever wondered whether words written 2,000 years ago have any relevance for our lives today, look no further than this part of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. Increasingly we live in a more and more toxic culture. People are divided along so many fault lines. There is no shortage of bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander and malice. Sad to say, the churches have their fare share of the same kind of behavior. It’s as if we’ve forgotten our calling to live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. When we forget our calling and we no longer try to be like God in our day-to-day lives, how in the world are people supposed to know we are Christians by our love? As someone has noted, although Paul writes to Christian believers, his words apply to our behavior as followers of God when we relate to anyone and everyone, whether they are in the church or not.

There is a story told about a 16th century priest named Philip Neri, who became known as “the Second Apostle of Rome.” When a parishioner confessed to the sin of gossip, he assigned her a most unusual penance. “Take a feather pillow and climb to the top of the church bell tower,” he told her. “Rip the pillow open and let the wind carry all of the feathers away. Then come back to see me.” After the woman had done what her priest told her, she went back to the church. He then told her, “Now for the second part of your penance. Go throughout the town and pick up every single feather that the wind has scattered everywhere.” Obviously the woman couldn’t do that, and the priest had made his point. Once our harmful words are scattered to the winds, it is impossible to retrieve all of them, and their negative effects will be felt in the community for years to come. *The Message* version of Paul’s exhortation to us as people who would be like God, who would imitate God, who would follow God, puts it this way: “Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:31-32) When we live like that, when we are like God in that way, the chances are much better that people just might know we are Christians by our love.

I hope it’s clear by now that Paul never expects us to be like God under our own power or by virtue of our own best intentions. Everything we are called to do and to be as God followers is based on God’s love for us in Jesus Christ. Consistent with Jesus’ teachings in his Sermon on the Mount, this way of life to which we are called is not so we can earn our way into heaven and merit God’s love or be praised as good and holy people. Instead, this way of life to which we are called — in Jesus’ teachings and Paul’s exhortations, indeed, throughout the whole Bible — is to be our thanksgiving and our faithful response to God’s amazing love for us in Jesus Christ.

And this life to which we are called as imitators of God, followers of God, is exactly that — a lifelong commitment and pursuit, what we speak of theologically as “sanctification,” and what Paul describes as working out our own salvation with fear and trembling. (Philippians 2:12) As Paul tells the Ephesians, it’s not enough just to stop one kind of negative behavior; you have to replace it with another positive behavior that leads to the building up of the body of Christ. The great Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther, taught that “Sanctification is the Holy Spirit’s work of making us holy. When the Holy Spirit creates faith in us, he renews in us the image of God so that through his power we produce good works. These good works are not meritorious but show the faith in our hearts. [Sanctification] is an ongoing process which will not be complete or reach perfection in this life.”<sup>4</sup>

But that is no reason for despair, because we are not making this journey of faith on our own. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses and we are part of a community of faith. We serve a God who has loved us in Jesus Christ. We have a Lord and Savior who loves us and gave himself up for us. And, as we are reminded when I baptize someone, “child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism, and marked as Christ’s own forever.” Because of this — so then — therefore — “Be like God!”

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***Let us pray: Gracious and loving God, help us to be like you, as your beloved children, forgiven by you, loved by Jesus Christ, and sealed by your Holy Spirit. Strengthen us by your grace, that we may live in love as Christ loved us. Amen.***

## NOTES

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***Let us pray: Gracious and loving God, help us to be like you, as your beloved children, forgiven by you, loved by Jesus Christ, and sealed by your Holy Spirit. Strengthen us by your grace, that we may live in love as Christ loved us. Amen.***

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**Romans 12:3-21**

**Ephesians 4:25 - 5:2**

**August 8, 2021**

*Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC*

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BE LIKE GOD**

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To the saints who are in Wallace and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Have you seen the wonderful video posted by NBC Sports? It showed up on my Facebook feed this week. A little girl named Chloe, maybe three years old, is watching U.S. gold medalist gymnast Suni Lee perform her floor routine. Her mom and dad are recording their daughter but are not in the picture. Chloe carefully follows everything Suni Lee does on the big screen TV on the living room wall. She then tries her best to imitate the gymnast. Chloe includes all of the sweeping hand motions, the spins, and the tumbles with her own version of somersaults. She even has a final flourish as the floor routine comes to an end. You can hear her mom say, “Chloe, you’re doing a wonderful job!”

Chloe’s imitation of Olympian Suni Lee reminds me of *The Message* translation of Ephesians 5:1 — “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.” They say “imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.” “Imitation” in the best, most genuine sense means to behave in a similar way to someone else, to follow someone as a model. The King James Version of this same verse says, “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.” One Lutheran commentator has put it this way, “Where the life of faith is founded on the humility, gentleness, and patience of Christ, there is imitation — Christ-like behavior. This is no cheap imitation either, but the genuine article. Our faith has marked us for redemption. Living as redeemed, our lives are the real thing, not ‘knockoffs’ of the humans we would be without God. In Christ, the church has begun to resemble the creature humanity was meant to be — a humanity created in God’s image.”<sup>1</sup>

Be imitators of God — be like God — be followers of God. That sounds familiar. Remember in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount when he says, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”? (Matthew 5:48) That’s sounds pretty intimidating, impossible even! But also remember that “perfect” can mean to have an aim, a goal, to be headed toward completion. In that sense, being perfect, being imitators of God, being like God, being followers of God means a lifelong journey of faith and service and, most of all, love.

Just as Jesus does in his Sermon on the Mount, here the apostle Paul gives specific instructions about how to live as Christian followers of God in the faith community. According to my count, Paul lists at least fourteen behaviors appropriate to believers,



including such advice as: be done with the lie; speak truth with your neighbor; if you get angry, don't sin; be reconciled before the sun sets; don't steal; share with the ones who have need; if you don't have something good to say, don't say anything at all; don't disappoint God's Holy Spirit by disregarding God's call; cut out all of the anger, bitterness, shouting, and insults; but be kind, tender-hearted, forgiving; be like God; and, most of all, walk in love.

But Paul is not just giving a first-century TED talk or a motivational speech at a self-help convention. Nor is he passing out advice about "14 Easy Steps to a More Successful Life." Instead, as Paul always does, he gives instructions to his fellow believers about how to live going forward, based on what God has already done for us in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. In fact, Paul builds that Trinitarian idea into his call to a life of love. He reminds us believers that God in Christ has forgiven us, that Christ loved us and gave himself for us, and that we have been marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit. As another writer has put it, "As God's 'beloved children,' we do not just love God, praise God, worship God, thank God. We also aim to imitate God, minding and then closing the gap between God's behavior and our own. To imitate God, only one thing is needful . . . love that sacrifices for the good of others. If we get that, we get it all."<sup>2</sup>

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**Romans 12:3-21**

**Ephesians 4:25 - 5:2**

**August 8, 2021**

*Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC*

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BE LIKE GOD**

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Be imitators of God — be like God — be followers of God. That sounds familiar. Remember in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount when he says, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”? (Matthew 5:48) That’s sounds pretty intimidating, impossible even! But also remember that “perfect” can mean to have an aim, a goal, to be headed toward completion. In that sense, being perfect, being imitators of God, being like God, being followers of God means a lifelong journey of faith and service and, most of all, love.

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We could say, "I want to be like God." On its own and out of context, that is certainly an arrogant statement! However, because of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, that is exactly who we should dream to be like. Well, how in the world are we supposed to be like God without falling prey to idolatry and self-righteousness and blasphemy? One way is to go back and read the Sermon on the Mount again and seek God's kingdom and righteousness first in our lives. Another way to be like God is to "live a life worthy of the calling to which [we] have been called, with all humility and

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I hope it’s clear by now that Paul never expects us to be like God under our own power or by virtue of our own best intentions. Everything we are called to do and to be as God followers is based on God’s love for us in Jesus Christ. Consistent with Jesus’ teachings in his Sermon on the Mount, this way of life to which we are called is not so we can earn our way into heaven and merit God’s love or be praised as good and holy people. Instead, this way of life to which we are called — in Jesus’ teachings and Paul’s exhortations, indeed, throughout the whole Bible — is to be our thanksgiving and our faithful response to God’s amazing love for us in Jesus Christ.

And this life to which we are called as imitators of God, followers of God, is exactly that — a lifelong commitment and pursuit, what we speak of theologically as “sanctification,” and what Paul describes as working out our own salvation with fear and trembling. (Philippians 2:12) As Paul tells the Ephesians, it’s not enough just to stop one kind of negative behavior; you have to replace it with another positive behavior that leads to the building up of the body of Christ. The great Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther, taught that “Sanctification is the Holy Spirit’s work of making us holy. When the Holy Spirit creates faith in us, he renews in us the image of God so that through his power we produce good works. These good works are not meritorious but show the faith in our hearts. [Sanctification] is an ongoing process which will not be complete or reach perfection in this life.”<sup>4</sup>

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And this life to which we are called as imitators of God, followers of God, is exactly that — a lifelong commitment and pursuit, what we speak of theologically as “sanctification,” and what Paul describes as working out our own salvation with fear and trembling. (Philippians 2:12) As Paul tells the Ephesians, it’s not enough just to stop one kind of negative behavior; you have to replace it with another positive behavior that leads to the building up of the body of Christ. The great Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther, taught that “Sanctification is the Holy Spirit’s work of making us holy. When the Holy Spirit creates faith in us, he renews in us the image of God so that through his power we produce good works. These good works are not meritorious but show the faith in our hearts. [Sanctification] is an ongoing process which will not be complete or reach perfection in this life.”<sup>4</sup>

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**Romans 12:3-21**

**Ephesians 4:25 - 5:2**

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*Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC*

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**Romans 12:3-21**

**Ephesians 4:25 - 5:2**

**August 8, 2021**

*Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC*

**TO THE SAINTS IN WALLACE  
BE LIKE GOD**

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To the saints who are in Wallace and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Have you seen the wonderful video posted by NBC Sports? It showed up on my Facebook feed this week. A little girl named Chloe, maybe three years old, is watching U.S. gold medalist gymnast Suni Lee perform her floor routine. Her mom and dad are recording their daughter but are not in the picture. Chloe carefully follows everything Suni Lee does on the big screen TV on the living room wall. She then tries her best to imitate the gymnast. Chloe includes all of the sweeping hand motions, the spins, and the tumbles with her own version of somersaults. She even has a final flourish as the floor routine comes to an end. You can hear her mom say, “Chloe, you’re doing a wonderful job!”

Chloe’s imitation of Olympian Suni Lee reminds me of *The Message* translation of Ephesians 5:1 — “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.” They say “imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.” “Imitation” in the best, most genuine sense means to behave in a similar way to someone else, to follow someone as a model. The King James Version of this same verse says, “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.” One Lutheran commentator has put it this way, “Where the life of faith is founded on the humility, gentleness, and patience of Christ, there is imitation — Christ-like behavior. This is no cheap imitation either, but the genuine article. Our faith has marked us for redemption. Living as redeemed, our lives are the real thing, not ‘knockoffs’ of the humans we would be without God. In Christ, the church has begun to resemble the creature humanity was meant to be — a humanity created in God’s image.”<sup>1</sup>

Be imitators of God — be like God — be followers of God. That sounds familiar. Remember in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount when he says, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”? (Matthew 5:48) That’s sounds pretty intimidating, impossible even! But also remember that “perfect” can mean to have an aim, a goal, to be headed toward completion. In that sense, being perfect, being imitators of God, being like God, being followers of God means a lifelong journey of faith and service and, most of all, love.

Just as Jesus does in his Sermon on the Mount, here the apostle Paul gives specific instructions about how to live as Christian followers of God in the faith community. According to my count, Paul lists at least fourteen behaviors appropriate to believers,

including such advice as: be done with the lie; speak truth with your neighbor; if you get angry, don't sin; be reconciled before the sun sets; don't steal; share with the ones who have need; if you don't have something good to say, don't say anything at all; don't disappoint God's Holy Spirit by disregarding God's call; cut out all of the anger, bitterness, shouting, and insults; but be kind, tender-hearted, forgiving; be like God; and, most of all, walk in love.

But Paul is not just giving a first-century TED talk or a motivational speech at a self-help convention. Nor is he passing out advice about "14 Easy Steps to a More Successful Life." Instead, as Paul always does, he gives instructions to his fellow believers about how to live going forward, based on what God has already done for us in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. In fact, Paul builds that Trinitarian idea into his call to a life of love. He reminds us believers that God in Christ has forgiven us, that Christ loved us and gave himself for us, and that we have been marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit. As another writer has put it, "As God's 'beloved children,' we do not just love God, praise God, worship God, thank God. We also aim to imitate God, minding and then closing the gap between God's behavior and our own. To imitate God, only one thing is needful . . . love that sacrifices for the good of others. If we get that, we get it all."<sup>2</sup>

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**Romans 12:3-21**

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**Romans 12:3-21**

**Ephesians 4:25 - 5:2**

**August 8, 2021**

*Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC*

**TO THE SAINTS IN WALLACE  
BE LIKE GOD**

***Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.***

To the saints who are in Wallace and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Have you seen the wonderful video posted by NBC Sports? It showed up on my Facebook feed this week. A little girl named Chloe, maybe three years old, is watching U.S. gold medalist gymnast Suni Lee perform her floor routine. Her mom and dad are recording their daughter but are not in the picture. Chloe carefully follows everything Suni Lee does on the big screen TV on the living room wall. She then tries her best to imitate the gymnast. Chloe includes all of the sweeping hand motions, the spins, and the tumbles with her own version of somersaults. She even has a final flourish as the floor routine comes to an end. You can hear her mom say, “Chloe, you’re doing a wonderful job!”

Chloe’s imitation of Olympian Suni Lee reminds me of *The Message* translation of Ephesians 5:1 — “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.” They say “imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.” “Imitation” in the best, most genuine sense means to behave in a similar way to someone else, to follow someone as a model. The King James Version of this same verse says, “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.” One Lutheran commentator has put it this way, “Where the life of faith is founded on the humility, gentleness, and patience of Christ, there is imitation — Christ-like behavior. This is no cheap imitation either, but the genuine article. Our faith has marked us for redemption. Living as redeemed, our lives are the real thing, not ‘knockoffs’ of the humans we would be without God. In Christ, the church has begun to resemble the creature humanity was meant to be — a humanity created in God’s image.”<sup>1</sup>

Be imitators of God — be like God — be followers of God. That sounds familiar. Remember in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount when he says, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”? (Matthew 5:48) That’s sounds pretty intimidating, impossible even! But also remember that “perfect” can mean to have an aim, a goal, to be headed toward completion. In that sense, being perfect, being imitators of God, being like God, being followers of God means a lifelong journey of faith and service and, most of all, love.

Just as Jesus does in his Sermon on the Mount, here the apostle Paul gives specific instructions about how to live as Christian followers of God in the faith community. According to my count, Paul lists at least fourteen behaviors appropriate to believers,

including such advice as: be done with the lie; speak truth with your neighbor; if you get angry, don't sin; be reconciled before the sun sets; don't steal; share with the ones who have need; if you don't have something good to say, don't say anything at all; don't disappoint God's Holy Spirit by disregarding God's call; cut out all of the anger, bitterness, shouting, and insults; but be kind, tender-hearted, forgiving; be like God; and, most of all, walk in love.

But Paul is not just giving a first-century TED talk or a motivational speech at a self-help convention. Nor is he passing out advice about "14 Easy Steps to a More Successful Life." Instead, as Paul always does, he gives instructions to his fellow believers about how to live going forward, based on what God has already done for us in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. In fact, Paul builds that Trinitarian idea into his call to a life of love. He reminds us believers that God in Christ has forgiven us, that Christ loved us and gave himself for us, and that we have been marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit. As another writer has put it, "As God's 'beloved children,' we do not just love God, praise God, worship God, thank God. We also aim to imitate God, minding and then closing the gap between God's behavior and our own. To imitate God, only one thing is needful . . . love that sacrifices for the good of others. If we get that, we get it all."<sup>2</sup>

Thirty years ago today, the first GatorAde commercial featuring Michael Jordan was broadcast. It is ranked as one of the best sports commercials ever produced. Many of you will remember the commercial because of its song:

*Sometimes I dream  
That he is me  
You've got to see that's how I dream to be  
I dream I move, I dream I groove  
Like Mike  
If I could be like Mike*

Interestingly, the commercial didn't do much for GatorAde sales, but it certainly helped Michael Jordan's image as a likeable, relatable superstar. According to one history of the marketing of the "Be Like Mike" commercial, "By including scenes of him playing basketball with children who copy his moves, Quaker was able to portray Jordan as an endearing, 'down-to-earth basketball megastar' who children wanted to emulate." One journalist wrote, "The moment where you have a Michael Jordan ad where lots of little white kids saying, 'I want to be like Mike.' That is an extraordinary, watershed moment. I don't think that was happening before."<sup>3</sup>

We could say, "I want to be like God." On its own and out of context, that is certainly an arrogant statement! However, because of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, that is exactly who we should dream to be like. Well, how in the world are we supposed to be like God without falling prey to idolatry and self-righteousness and blasphemy? One way is to go back and read the Sermon on the Mount again and seek God's kingdom and righteousness first in our lives. Another way to be like God is to "live a life worthy of the calling to which [we] have been called, with all humility and

gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:1-3)

Paul adds some more instructions to that call to a certain way of life as followers of God that we heard last Sunday. Notice the rhythm he establishes: give up stealing/share with the needy; let no evil talk come out of your mouth/only what is useful for building up; put away all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice/be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another.

If you’ve ever wondered whether words written 2,000 years ago have any relevance for our lives today, look no further than this part of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. Increasingly we live in a more and more toxic culture. People are divided along so many fault lines. There is no shortage of bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander and malice. Sad to say, the churches have their fare share of the same kind of behavior. It’s as if we’ve forgotten our calling to live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. When we forget our calling and we no longer try to be like God in our day-to-day lives, how in the world are people supposed to know we are Christians by our love? As someone has noted, although Paul writes to Christian believers, his words apply to our behavior as followers of God when we relate to anyone and everyone, whether they are in the church or not.

There is a story told about a 16th century priest named Philip Neri, who became known as “the Second Apostle of Rome.” When a parishioner confessed to the sin of gossip, he assigned her a most unusual penance. “Take a feather pillow and climb to the top of the church bell tower,” he told her. “Rip the pillow open and let the wind carry all of the feathers away. Then come back to see me.” After the woman had done what her priest told her, she went back to the church. He then told her, “Now for the second part of your penance. Go throughout the town and pick up every single feather that the wind has scattered everywhere.” Obviously the woman couldn’t do that, and the priest had made his point. Once our harmful words are scattered to the winds, it is impossible to retrieve all of them, and their negative effects will be felt in the community for years to come. *The Message* version of Paul’s exhortation to us as people who would be like God, who would imitate God, who would follow God, puts it this way: “Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:31-32) When we live like that, when we are like God in that way, the chances are much better that people just might know we are Christians by our love.

I hope it’s clear by now that Paul never expects us to be like God under our own power or by virtue of our own best intentions. Everything we are called to do and to be as God followers is based on God’s love for us in Jesus Christ. Consistent with Jesus’ teachings in his Sermon on the Mount, this way of life to which we are called is not so we can earn our way into heaven and merit God’s love or be praised as good and holy people. Instead, this way of life to which we are called — in Jesus’ teachings and Paul’s exhortations, indeed, throughout the whole Bible — is to be our thanksgiving and our faithful response to God’s amazing love for us in Jesus Christ.

And this life to which we are called as imitators of God, followers of God, is exactly that — a lifelong commitment and pursuit, what we speak of theologically as “sanctification,” and what Paul describes as working out our own salvation with fear and trembling. (Philippians 2:12) As Paul tells the Ephesians, it’s not enough just to stop one kind of negative behavior; you have to replace it with another positive behavior that leads to the building up of the body of Christ. The great Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther, taught that “Sanctification is the Holy Spirit’s work of making us holy. When the Holy Spirit creates faith in us, he renews in us the image of God so that through his power we produce good works. These good works are not meritorious but show the faith in our hearts. [Sanctification] is an ongoing process which will not be complete or reach perfection in this life.”<sup>4</sup>

But that is no reason for despair, because we are not making this journey of faith on our own. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses and we are part of a community of faith. We serve a God who has loved us in Jesus Christ. We have a Lord and Savior who loves us and gave himself up for us. And, as we are reminded when I baptize someone, “child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism, and marked as Christ’s own forever.” Because of this — so then — therefore — “Be like God!”

In the fall of 2013, archivists and curators at the New York State Museum dug through their audio archives in order to digitize and preserve them. Someone found an old reel-to-reel tape with a piece of masking tape stuck on it. The label said “Martin Luther King, Jr., Emancipation Proclamation Speech 1962.” No one knew the tape existed, and it is the only recording of Dr. King’s speech.

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That perfectly describes the calling to which we have been called — forgiven by God, loved by Jesus Christ, and marked and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

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***Let us pray: Gracious and loving God, help us to be like you, as your beloved children, forgiven by you, loved by Jesus Christ, and sealed by your Holy Spirit. Strengthen us by your grace, that we may live in love as Christ loved us. Amen.***



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