

OUR REDEEMER LUTHERAN CHURCH

2nd Sunday in Lent

Philippians 3:17-4:1

“A Heavenly Pattern to Follow”

JJ

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“Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.”

There is something that is very common in many work places, in many professions, in many occupations. It is the concept of training by ‘shadowing’ or an apprentice system. For example, anyone who has been a patient at University Hospital has probably been visited by a doctor and several students wishing to learn by following a doctor—listening, watching, following patterns and procedures.

You can see it with plumbers, electricians, carpenters. Much is learned by following the pattern of an experienced practitioner. Teachers go through “student teaching” and pastors go through vicarage, an internship under the guidance of an experienced pastor.

Sad to say, there are negative illustrations of this concept. People are not only being trained to do good and wholesome things in our world. Unfortunately, we see the extreme example in the terrorists who are training people to do evil, to damage and destroy, to injure and kill. The pattern some are following is a pattern of creating fear and hatred. It is a pattern that sets aside the valuing of life or bringing joy to life and replaces it with a goal of bringing chaos and terror and fear to life.

Why such evil? Why such a twisted and ugly view of life? It is clearly of the devil. Jesus was speaking with people who said “Abraham is our father.” But Jesus said to them: (John 8:44) “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

The evil in our world is of the evil one, Satan. He is putting in peoples’ hearts to murder innocent people; he is putting in peoples’ hearts the lie that this is right and good. Lord, deliver us from the attacks of the evil one and turn the hearts of those who are being trained to do evil.

But we must bring this closer to home, based on our Epistle. Our “walk through life” may take us on wrong paths. We are tempted to walk in the path of those “whose mind is set on earthly things.” Who is training us in how to live? Whose pattern are we following? Is it those who are “enemies of the cross of Christ?” Are we being trained by those who think God’s Word and God’s view are old fashioned? Are we following in the path and pattern of those who have an earthly god who satisfies earthly pleasures? Are we following in the path and pattern of those who glory in what they should be ashamed of? What pattern are we following?

O Holy Spirit, help us to repent and turn away from the paths of evil and follow the living way of Jesus.

It is important for us to listen to these words from St. Paul: "But our citizenship is in heaven." The pattern we are to follow is heavenly; our guidance comes not from this world but from heaven and God's Word. Here is the pattern God wants us to follow:

First of all, our pattern is Jesus. (20-21) Our text tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ will ultimately transform us to be like Himself. On the Last Day our lowly body will become like His glorious body.

However, God wants Jesus to be the One after whom we pattern our life here and now on this earth.

God wants us to be "conformed to the image of His Son." Rom. 8:29

Peter says we are to "follow in Jesus' steps." 1 Peter 2:21

Jesus' message to His disciples, "Follow Me", was something new in Jesus' day. It was not about following an institution or club with certain rules and regulations. It was following a person. And He provided a new way of living, a new way of thinking, a new way of acting and speaking—a new pattern for life. What is the pattern?

"Whoever would be great among you must be your servant...even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matt. 20:26-28

Paul tells us: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Eph. 5:1-2

We are to pattern our life after His self-giving love. However, this is more than a pattern for us. The death of Jesus is not the pattern for living so much as the power for living. For it is through His death for us that we are moved to love and serve Him and each other.

"He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." 2 Cor. 5:15 There is power in the pattern!

Secondly, the pattern God provides is fellow believers, St. Paul says in our text: "Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us."

It is one of the reasons we have Sponsors or God-parents so that they can provide a pattern of Christian living for children after Baptism. Furthermore, we are to be a pattern for each other as adults as we follow Christ and His pattern. It is only as we follow Him that we can say to each other, "Follow me." Are we, by our lives, providing a pattern that is Christ-like for others to follow?

Finally, our heavenly pattern is to be shown in the Christian home and family. "Parents, do not treat your children in such a way as to make them angry. Instead, raise them with Christian discipline and instruction." Eph. 6:4

St. Paul said of Timothy: "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you." 2 Tim. 1:5

Parents, grandparents, do we realize the importance of our attitudes, our conduct, our way of life and the pattern that we may establish for our children and grandchildren?

If we expect our children to become God-fearing, Christ-following people, then we must set that pattern for them to see and hear.

The last verse of our text provides the enabling power for us to carry out this overwhelming and challenging task: “Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.” Phil. 4:1

May we stand firm in the Lord in order to be empowered to follow His heavenly pattern. Amen.