

Text: Philippians 3:17-4:1

Theme: Imitators

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

My dear beloved flock, the text for our mediation this morning is the Epistle Lesson of Saint Paul's letter to the church in Philippi, the third chapter verse seventeen through chapter four verse one.

Illustration: Following a leader.

Boys and Girls, how are you doing this morning? I pray that you are doing well. Can we play a game this morning? Have you ever played the game "Simon Says"? For those of you who have not, whenever I say Simon Says...you do it. For example, Simon says, pat your head. Good Job! If I say to do something, for example, rub your belly. I did not say Simon says so you would be out. This game illustrates what Saint Paul is talking about in our text for today. Just as you imitate what the leader says to do as you play the game, Saint Paul says to imitate him. How can we imitate Saint Paul? Ponder

that question as you listen to the rest of the sermon. You may go back to your seats and those who love you.

Saint Paul says to imitate Him

In our text for today, Saint Paul says to imitate him in his Christian life. Now you may be wondering, how can we imitate someone as great as Saint Paul? He ranks highly among apostles and writers. He proclaimed the gospel to thousands of people, to commoners and kings. He had experienced the fellowship of sharing in Christ's sufferings. Most recently he had suffered the loss of his personal freedom for the sake of Christ. Yet that did not stop Saint Paul. He was a prolific writer. Most of the New Testament is full of Saint Paul's letters to the various Christian churches.

Yet as great as Saint Paul was, he knew that he was a sinner. He was a former persecutor of the church at large, seeking to kill the young Church with fiery passion, letting nothing stand in his way. He had not "arrived" spiritually or had reached the goal of perfection. Paul was still living in a sinful

world. He was still a sinner, still troubled by the weaknesses and failings of his sinful nature. Though he was a child of God by faith, he had not yet arrived at the point where he could perfectly and uninterruptedly serve God or enjoy the fullness of the blessings God had in store for him. That would have to wait until he entered heaven. Meanwhile he lived his life as a Christian in a constant striving for holiness. He pressed on toward perfection.¹ Thus why Saint Paul tells us to imitate him in his Christian walk as presses on towards the goal. He knows that he is not perfect but he continues to strive for that goal. He uses the example of a runner running a race. Every single atom of their being strains forward for one thing and one thing only. They press on for the end, to win the race and gain the reward.

We join with Saint Paul in this race as well. We know that we too are not perfect. We sin daily and greatly in our thoughts, words, and deeds. We break the Law of God often and stand condemned under it. No matter how we may try, we cannot free ourselves

¹ Kuschel, H. J. (1986). [*Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*](#) (p. 76). Northwestern Pub. House.

of our sins. We will never be perfect. This fact might stop us from running the race. After all, if we cannot achieve it, why even bother trying in the first place? Under this mindset we could very easily become lazy or despaired or gave up striving for perfection² We do not stop running the race. We keep pressing forward, straining for that goal, not because we can achieve it on our own, but because Jesus Christ has done it for us on our behalf.

Ultimately, following our Lord to the cross, seeing His suffering, death and resurrection.

We know and believe that what Jesus has done when He walked upon this earth, He did for me and you. In our place, Jesus lived a perfect life. Through His miracles, he shows that He is God in the flesh for us. Through His teachings, He teaches us the way to show that we are Christians upon this earth. Everything Jesus did, He did for you. Culminating in what took place in Jerusalem. Throughout this Lententide, we are following our Lord as He sets His face firmly toward Jerusalem. He goes, knowing

² Kuschel, H. J. (1986). [*Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*](#) (p. 78). Northwestern Pub. House.

what will happen. He will be betrayed into the hands of sinful men. These men will kill Him by crucifying Jesus on the cross. On the cross, He pays the price for every single one of our sins by the shedding of His holy, precious blood. Paying the price of our sins, a great exchange takes place. He takes our sins, removes them from us and gives to us His righteousness, His perfection.

Jesus does what we could never do. He gives us His perfection and makes us perfect. This is a present reality, something that we have right now. This encourage us to continue in faith and hope, knowing that while we will never achieve perfection on our own this side of heaven, our Lord has given it to us already. We know that we have it, and we look forward to the end, standing firm in the Lord.

Imitating Him as we live our lives, Christians= little Christs to those around us.

Until that Day, we do not wait idly. Rather, we are busy. We imitate the sacrifice of our Lord, as well as the sacrifice of Saint Paul, as we live out our daily lives. That is one of the reasons we are called

Christians. In parsing out that word, we have two sections, Christ and ian. Christ is of course our Lord. Ian means little. Christian means Little Christ. That as we go about our daily lives, we reflect the light of Christ to those around us. As the old adage says, “The only Bible some people read is you.” As we are parents, grandparents, workers, employees, consumers, and much more, we interact with those around us and have an opportunity to show to them the Gospel of Christ. To show them the forgiveness, repentance and perfection that Christ gives to us.

We do this, trusting in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection. He has made us perfect. We look forward to the Day when He comes again in glory and we will be with Him, perfected in His holiness, forever and ever.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.