

**Pentecost 10B 2009    Ephesians 5:1,2**

**“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God”**

My father's name is John. This week someone I have never met said to me: “I think I recognize you, you must be John's brother”. Now I love my dad but he is 76 years old and I am 52. He may have been flattered when I told him about it but I was not. I know I look a bit more like him with every wrinkle as I get older, but 76 I am not! I politely informed the man I was John's son, but I am happy to take after him in some ways.

This morning I look at a little boy, Blake, brought here for baptism and wonder who I can see in him - mum Raelene or dad Tim or a bit of both, and maybe a bit of grandma or grandpa thrown in? As he grows up he will not only look a bit like you but he will also say some of the things you say and do some of the things you do and copy some of your habits and mannerisms. That's flattering but also scary for most of us to think about. We are born in the mould of our parents and we pick up their ways and habits more than we know. Often it is other people who see it more than we do and we don't always like it when they tell us who they see in us.

The same is true of our heavenly parent, God, our heavenly Father. We were born in his image, created by him to reflect him, his nature and being and life and love. The trouble is, like rebellious children we have all broken out of that mould, we don't live the way we were made to and God wants us to. We go our own way and do our own thing and while some times our lives give a glimpse of how God wanted each of us to turn out, often they do not. Often we show signs that we are in the mould of our first parents, Adam and Eve and of every parent since them. God is giving, and loving to the nth degree, we are not. And so the image of God we see in each other is a distorted image, distorted by the selfishness we call sin.

The Christian faith says our loving Father's answer to our problem and his problem with us was not to punish us or abandon us but to send us another child, his own Son, born of Mary and so like us, but born of the Holy Spirit, and so God himself. Jesus Christ, God's Son and our brother, born to show us how life was meant to be lived as a reflection of our heavenly Father himself. And the heart of our faith says that Jesus is far more than an impossible example to us to follow or imitate, he gave up his perfect life as a sacrifice of love, taking on himself everything about us that is not what we were meant to be and to suffer and die for it. All our selfishness, all the things we have said or done to ruin relationships, and we get forgiven, we remain loved by God despite what we have done to hurt him and other people.

In baptism we are joined to Jesus inseparably, and we are cleansed of our past present and future and covered with Christ's holiness, and given a new life to wear and walk in. Every day we are tempted to go back to our old way of life that reflects our old adam and old eve, our sinful nature. And every day God calls us to leave that behind and live for him, in fact to live like him.

**“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God”**

We are dearly loved children, our baptism says so. We don't try to become dearly loved children we just are because God loves us, just as your children don't try to become your children they just are because you love them.

Just as a child consciously and unconsciously learns from and imitates their parents, so a Christian is called to imitate God. We are meant to reflect him and his love.

What does “a life of love” look like? You could spend a lifetime observing what Jesus did, how he treated people, how he spoke and acted. You could spend time looking at the commandments positively rather than negatively. And you could look at the verses before these words, verses which call us to get rid of one kind of life each day like taking off old rotting clothes and to put on the new set of clothes, the new life given to us when we were baptised. Listen to them again.

**“Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. "In your anger do not sin" Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” (v25-32)**

The way we build people up by the way we speak and not tear them down, the way we deal with our anger, our honesty, hard work and generosity, the way we speak the truth and live with integrity, and above all the way we show compassion for people and are ready to forgive people who fail us as Christ has forgiven us, imitates and copies what God has done for us and shows that we are a chip of the old block, that we know a loving and forgiving God and Father and we know Jesus his son. He gave up his rights so that we might have the right to be called the children of God, as we heard again in the forgiveness we received this morning.

Children watch adults from the very beginnings of their lives. They watch us spiritually too. They pick up what we believe and how we practice what we say we believe. The world around us watches us too. That’s scary because we all know how imperfect an example we leave behind each day. But just as a loving parent picks up a fallen child and dusts them off and sends them on their way again so God forgives us, he picks us up when we have stumbled and fallen and not walked the way he wants us to and sends us on our way for him once more. That’s forgiveness. That’s the air we breath and the fragrance in the air we enjoy as Christians all because of Christ, who gave himself for us. That is the air we are meant to leave behind and around us each day for other people.

A Christ-like manner smells good to God. A life that thinks of self is on the nose to God and will be to people in the vicinity as well. As people look at us as Christians they are meant to see that while we are just like them in many ways, and just like our human parents, and still imperfect, we also take after and resemble and give them a glimpse of our heavenly Father.

The love of God our Father and Jesus his son for us can never be replicated or duplicated. Who can or wants to die on a cross for other people?! But that love can be imitated and reflected by us who have come to know it and who have received it in our baptism. When we do it is like a sweet smelling fragrance in the air to God, and leaves a flavour in the air for others to catch. God help us to imitate him and fragrance the atmosphere in our relationships for him week.