

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
Sermon Text: Ephesians 4:25-5:2
Related Text: John 6:35, 41-51
Date Preached: August 9, 2009

Note: Emphasis with World Hunger Appeal
First Sermon preached since ELCA gathering

Grace to you and peace from God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

Infants and young toddlers often do a great job at imitating adults and in particular their parents. You smile, they smile back. If you say something, they may repeat it. Children will even imitate us when we don't want them to, which of course can be quite embarrassing.

In the reading from Ephesians, the Apostle Paul bids us, children of God to “Be imitators of God.”

So, if we were to imitate God what would we be doing? Well, let's take some cues from the Ephesians reading. We'd be kind to one another. We'd forgive one another as opposed to holding grudges. We'd be tender-hearted, which would lead to expressions of kindness. We would say things that build people up as opposed to the gossip that can so easily tear someone down. We'd speak the truth in love. We'd even get angry, but not sin.

Therein is our difficulty. We do sin. We are not always kind. That is not to say that we are bad to people, but we may far too frequently be indifferent.

We may let fears of whether we have enough keep us from being generous to the needs of others. Will God truly provide me with the daily bread we ask for in the Lord's Prayer?

We express our anger in destructive ways. In our human brokenness we far too often take the eye for an eye approach as opposed to God's approach of forgiveness. Be imitators of God.

And the interesting thing about imitating God is that there is a place for anger. "Be angry but do not sin?" How is that possible? Let's look at this from the issue of world hunger.

One of the things those who attended the ELCA Youth Gathering heard from speakers and in at various information booths is that poverty is at the root cause of so many world issues. Statistics on the ELCA website are quite distressing. In developing countries 947 million people are undernourished. An estimated one billion people live on less than a dollar a day. Yes, many of the people who are poor or undernourished live in countries that are far less

developed. But even in the wealthy countries like our United States, roughly 11 million people experience hunger. The hunger experienced is not the same hunger we might have where we say, oh, what will I have for lunch or I need to go grocery shopping. This is hunger of skipping meals or going a day without eating to try to stretch one's money to pay for other necessities such as rent, clothing, or day care.

Imitating God calls us to have compassion for the hungry in our midst regardless of where they live. Just as Christ had compassion on the crowd that gathered to hear him, as members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America we have responded with compassion through the World Hunger Appeal.

Through gifts of money to the World Hunger Appeal, grants are given in many of the United States for food pantries. Through the World Hunger Appeal, volunteers are able to go to developing countries and teach communities of people how to farm and get the best production out of farm animals.

Prior to heading to the Youth Gathering, every participant was asked to contribute toward the one million dollar youth challenge. When I checked the website on Friday, over \$219,000 has been raised.

The challenge of course will continue. The ELCA website has more details on how. The point is however, that through our giving we imitate God who is the great giver.

We imitate God, the creator and giver of life. We imitate the generous God who gives abundantly using even the smallest of gifts, like bread and wine to feed his people is the sacrament of Holy Communion.

God daily fills us with his abundant grace. That grace was poured out in the giving of his only begotten Son for the life of the world. Christ has died for the world. That work is done. Christ has arisen for the life of the world. That work is done. Those two things lift the burden of trying to earn our salvation so that we can imitate God in this life through self-giving love for our neighbors near and far.

Through tiny gifts, like drops of rain that fall to the ground and moisten the earth, filling lakes, ponds, streams, reservoirs, lives will be changed, communities restored, children fed and nourished so that they can attend school, and the effects of poverty diminish. In this way, God is at work through our hands. All this happens by imitating God and imitating his love for the world. AMEN.