

When you look into a mirror, what do you see? Are you a reflection of someone else, or your own person? Everyone has role models and dreams, yet each is told to be his or her own person. It is confusing, isn't it?

We want to be unique yet aren't always comfortable in our own skin. Each of us has someone or something to live up to. Yet, each wants to make his or her own way in life. We would love to be pioneers and yet are captive to our environment. And so the key is to carefully make choices about who patterns and guides the choices we make.

Paul's letter to Ephesus seems disturbing in its description of the way some people were living. He was speaking to people in a culture that had no moral base. Stealing, lying, slander, bitterness, anger, and greed were all considered acceptable behaviors as each set his own moral code. But wait a minute, that feels more familiar than we like to admit as we hear and see many of those same traits today.

Paul's goal was to help explain that following Jesus meant adopting a brand-new lifestyle. And that invitation is the same for us today.

Genesis proclaims God created us to be in his image ... like a mirror. Genesis said God plan was (and is) for us to reflect his love and be copies of his true Light. Yet, we know that doesn't always easily come to be. The struggles of life are no different today than in Paul's day, we simply have different choices and temptations which beckon us to reflect selfishness and sin rather than the light of God's love.

What image do others see in how we act, speak, and live. Do they see a mirror image of a broken and selfish world or the glow of the God who created us. Consider how disagreements get handled in our culture, whether by politicians, nations, or even neighbors. Do they adopt loving tones and servant roles or utilize force, power, and demeaning attacks? Paul encourages disciples of Jesus to choose a better way.

We all are familiar with the incredible technology of today's scanner and copy machines. They are a blessing and a curse for it is often impossible to ascertain whether you have an original document or a copy. Is it counterfeit or real? Computer files and photos can be moved from one location to another, and the copy is exactly like the original. In the same way, each of us have become copies of someone. Our parents, our role models, our moods or environment.

What do others see when they see us? What does God see? Do we want to try to mirror God's love or simply be another example of a broken world? How we live reflects our deepest interests and needs. Sometimes we are afraid to step out of the shadows, but honestly, what do you wish for your living to reflect, taste, or smell like to others?

How can you or I become what God has called us to be? The prophet Elijah wrestled with that and headed out into the desert, knowing he needed (for a time) to physically move away from what was distracting and harmful to his faith. In that tie of retreat and reflection, a heavenly messenger brought him food and drink for his forty-day stay in the wilderness. When Jesus embarked on a similar forty-day journey, he was following in

the pattern of Elijah, as he sought to make his own future clear.

In the same way, as we take time to withdraw from what is routine or uninspired and choose instead to feed through prayer or God's many gifts of grace, we open ourselves to his feeding and leading that offers, like manna, new sustenance for returning into what surrounds us each day. Such reflection reminds us of what sets us apart from the world, even as we live in the world.

Paul reminds us that left alone, we would have only the world as our example to copy and would be no different from those who allow the brokenness of sin to lead and guide every thought, word, and action. God's love is so great He came in a shape and form we could recognize and said, "Copy Me!" Become the new creation that God has made you to be. Let his love be the sweet scent of your living!

This is true discipleship. To become, as much as we can, a copy of the original. Christ welcomed outcasts and imperfect people to join him for meals and for conversation. He touched lepers, was unafraid of contact with the sick, and rubbed shoulders with those who were different. Having reflected such heavenly glory, he went a step farther and accepted the sins of all as he climbed on the cross. The sinless, guiltless, most loving life ever willingly died for the crimes, selfishness, and ego of an entire world.

None of us can imagine doing the same. This was a unique and perfect gift as our Messiah removed himself from the glory and perfection of heaven to live without any of the privilege or power that came from his throne. Which of us would surrender glory, wealth, power, and health, to live as the least of the street people in this world? We are as different from God as night is from Day! And yet, God's love accepts us and encourages us to learn as best as we are able, to follow in his footsteps.

The good news is that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are like a sweet fragrance that get our attention and draw us to a new kind of living. He lowered himself to cover the stench of sin, even though such grace wasn't deserved. We now have an opportunity to decide what that means in our lives. What will our living proclaim to others?

Such reflections of the One who loves even us will have incredible impacts on those around us, when his forgiving love and service are his reflections in us. Think of it this way, we all know how to use a mirror, but seldom take enough time to consider what others see in and through us.

How we live doesn't determine whether or not God loves us, but how we live shows whether or not His love has any meaning for each of us. In Elijah's miracle meal from heaven, Jesus' angelic snack in desert, Israel's daily gift of manna, or a taste of heavenly banquet in Communion we are reminded that God acts first.

My actions can't motivate God. His love is not from any good works, but if his love means anything at all, to follow means to allow his example of servant love to become the reflection that others might begin to see in me.

That will happen as we quit becoming so engrossed with the world around us and begin each day by focusing on the love of Jesus. Then we are ready to face the world. Each

life adopts patterns, routines, and rituals. Will they be shaped by a broken world that cannot heal itself, or the broken and healed body of Christ?

This is what Paul meant as he said, "become a fragrant offering; a loving sacrifice!" In tradition of God's "I AM WHO I AM" we are called to become what God has made us to be!" With God's help we can begin to learn! And through faithful efforts, we can learn to copy that same servant love. (What a contrast to the world that seeks and deflects its brokenness through power, anger, distraction, and attack.)

Everyone has expectations of us – but only God's is the one our response should consider. Will we play out the role the world expects or surprise even ourselves with the sweet fragrance of trying to imitate CHRIST?" And even when we fail, God is there to pick us up and give us strength and guidance to try again. And again.

THIS is true discipleship! THIS is who we are created to be. Go in peace. Serve the Lord, not as cheap imitations but as the fragrant offerings of love that have touched and changed even you and me! -tws