

SERMON

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Pentecost 20, A- October 11, 2026
Isaiah 25:6- 9 Philippians 4:4-13 Matthew 22:1-14

“What you learned and received and heard and seen in me-- practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you” - Philippians 4:11

It's easy for us to be unaware of the power our example has on others-

- and often when we discover what's happening,
- and our example has caused problems,
- it's too late to change things..

In marriage counseling,

- time is spent on helping couples
- to describe their “families of origin”.

The way things were in the family relationships where

- we grew up is important--
- because especially under stress we revert to interacting with others
- to the way things were done back then.

So let's say that a new husband had a father

- who had been a real tyrant in the house.
- He had learned from his father's unpleasant,
- even scary behavior
- that he would NOT want to be like that in His own household some day.

But then, UNDER STRESS, the new husband starts acting

- just like his dad used to do.
- His new wife can't believe what she is seeing--
- it's like a different person from the one she married.

Or a wife may under stress deal with conflict the way her mother did--

- as unhelpful as that may have been.

Let's say she had a mother who was passive/aggressive--

- not standing up for herself
- but instead quietly absorbing what she didn't like
- and outwardly going along,
- but keeping a long record of those wrongs inside her--
- and then engaging in quiet sabotage for her revenge.

Under stress, her daughter may almost automatically

- revert to that same behavior.
- Even if she has learned in marriage counseling
- there are better ways to deal with a conflict!

What we model-- even in little things--

- does have a greater impact than we realize at the time.

How many of us when we grow older

- find ourselves saying the very same thing our parents used to say--

- back when we thought they didn't know anything?

Or what parent has not been shocked to see his or her

- own WORST habits mirrored in those of their children?...

Thankfully, parents also eventually see

- many of their good behavior patterns mirrored too.

Also in church, how often does not the attitude of one person

- affect the attitude of the whole congregation?

- If a leader is positive, upbeat, caring, and modeling faith,

- the effect is contagious.

On the other hand, if a leader is always negative,

- or even an outspoken regular member,

- ever finding reasons why things can't be changed or tried,

- what a killing effect that can have on the life of a congregation.

In my own life,

- I can easily think of persons whose examples greatly affected me

- in a positive way.

- Hometown pastors,

- some wonderful professors,

- special relatives.

- Especially the movie cowboy Roy Rogers when I was a boy,

- who was the good guy,
- always wearing a white hat
- and in real life, a practicing Christian.

But the point of this sermon is NOT that

- we have to be a famous movie star to influence others,
- for better or for worse.
- Each one of us already does that
- in the lives we touch each and every day,
- in our routine daily life and work.
- What we model may seem to be a small thing,
- but consequences can be big and long-lasting.

Today we observe Lutheran Women's Missionary League Sunday.

- Not many of its members are movie stars
- In fact, while it's easy for many of us to develop the idea
- that we will finally do some significant things for others
- if and when someday we receive windfall of money,
- the LWML has always had MITE boxes--
- places to put our daily extra **loose change** for offerings.

The name for those offering boxes is taken from

- the famous story about Jesus observing

- how as a poor widow gave her small mite at the Temple.

Jesus said that

- she gave more than the rich with their impressive offerings,
- because the widow gave her all.

And from those outwardly unimpressive LWML mite boxes,

- used in thousands of congregations over the years,
- untold numbers of people around the world have been touched
- with the Gospel of Jesus Christ-- in the farthest corners of the earth,
- and with some much needed help for their pressing, unaddressed needs.

In that non-flashy, steady service

- we have a great example for every Christian life,
- a model of what simple, steady faithfulness can do.

That widow who first gave her mite

- could not have imagined in her wildest dreams
- what her humble example would accomplish for our world.

Jesus Himself, whose earthly life and death

- are still impacting our world,
- was not a movie star, or high-born, or wealthy.
- He lived simply,
- but He offered Himself to the Father's service--

- and by His steady faithful life
- the whole world was blessed
- with access to the treasures in heaven
- through following Him.
- trusting Him
- and receiving through faith,
- the blessings His example of faithful obedience won.

Recall how Jesus Himself

- picked twelve generally unimpressive characters to be His disciples
- and, incredibly, commissioned THEM
- to take His message to all the world.

THEY had no great wealth or power or fame--

- or even much education--
- but they accepted the call of Jesus to follow Him,
- and the world of their day was turned upside down.

We are still inspired by their words

- as they are recorded for us in the Holy Scriptures,
- as well as by the stories of their lives and martyr-deaths.
- Their examples are models with effects centuries later,
- to this very day.

We may feel **our** examples are mite-like in their importance,

- but we need to leave it to God to judge that--
- and to use our examples for **His** often unknown or mysterious purposes.

Our examples DO count. Even in little things.....

But what about the fact that we do not always do so well imitating Jesus

- and those who faithfully follow Him?
- Are we just to feel frustrated and give up?

You may remember that the Bible teaches

- that human beings were created “in the image of God.”
- Just as a coin Jesus took in hand
- was stamped with Caesar’s image
- and so it belonged to him,
- humans are stamped with the image of God
- and, as we heard also last Sunday, we belong to God.

Because of the Fall into sin, the image of God is blurred and tarnished

- on and in us--
- barely recognizable at times,
- sometimes not at all.

All too often we do NOT

- live as though we belonged to Him.

- But Jesus Christ is the perfect image of God.

“He IS THE image of the invisible God”

we read in Colossians 1:15.

In Hebrews 1:3 Christ is described as

- the “radiance of God’s glory

- and the EXACT REPRESENTATION of His being.”

Jesus Christ came to be what we are unable to be--

- and He came to be that FOR US--

- living the perfect life we could not live,

- dying the death we sinners deserved, in our stead.

As God’s baptized children we have been joined to Christ.

- Now by the Holy Spirit’s work

- the image of God is being daily renewed in us.

In God’s eyes we are already holy,

- covered with Christ’s own righteousness,

- which we receive by means of faith

- in the promises connected to Word and Sacraments

- When God looks at us,

- He sees us IN Christ Jesus.

We are not perfect yet,

- but we are growing toward
- becoming more and more
- what God has declared us to be by grace.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18 we read,

“(WE) all reflect the Lord’s glory and are being **transformed** into HIS LIKENESS, with an **ever-increasing** glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

In other words, in our Christian life we sinners,

- who do **often** fail in our own examples,
- CAN expect to grow more and more Christ-like--

Striving to imitate Jesus in being a model for others

- is not something that we should give up on at all.

We heard the words of St. Paul today that many find helpful to remember

- and repeat to themselves in their personal lives:
- “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”

No, we don’t expect to be perfect at it until we reach heaven.

- We will need daily forgiveness as we try....
- WHICH IS THERE IN CHRIST FOR EACH ONE OF US.

But that same Paul who can do all things through Christ

- also refers to Himself as “Chief of Sinners”
- unable to do the good He wants to do on his own.

So we too DO expect that we can become better at being examples.

- And that forgiveness we need is bigger by far than any failing.

And what a great feeling of fulfillment comes

- to any Christian as he or she does something
- just because it is the Christ-like thing to do!

Then we are truly being

- what we were created and redeemed to be.

What a beautiful blessing it is

- if another person actually recognizes Christ in us--
- which is the image of God being restored!

And what a DOUBLE blessing--

- when we notice one day that someone else is imitating us
- as we imitate the Lord!
- What joy there is for us then
- in sensing a touch of the divine
- stamped on our own lives....

Imitating Jesus is nothing less than

- living out our Baptisms
- where we were joined to Him
- for life,

- a life like His
- a life with Him
- that flows from His Cross and empty tomb
- and not from our own perfect success in being examples.

Christ's own Presence will be living in us by faith as we leave this place.....

May we all determine to let it show.

Then imitating Him

- won't seem so strange at all--
- but sort of like our second nature.

And if we are using the mite boxes,

- let them be a powerful reminder of how little things DO count
- as we go about our often chaotic daily lives.

Think of your life as a Mite box.

Jesus is still noticing--

- as He promised.

“Insofar as **you** did this for the least of these,... you did it for Me.”

- Matthew 25:40