

**The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**August 8-9, 2009**  
**Ephesians 4:25-5:2**

*“Christ’s Copy Cats”*

We value being original, don’t we? To be accused of being a “copy cat,” especially when we’re young, is bad news and can get you in trouble if you copy another person’s work in school. I was curious where the phrase “copy cat” came from and here’s what I found out: the origins of this phrase are uncertain, but seem to go back hundreds of years to the period of late Middle English when the word “cat” was used as a derogatory term referring to another person. Sometime later it seems the two individual words were joined together, building on that earlier use of “cat” with the word “copy” to indicate someone you might not like doing exactly what you yourself are doing. In today’s Second (Epistle) Lesson, Paul the apostle encourages believers to be “copy cats,” if you will – not of one another, but of God as he writes: **“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to the Lord”** (Ephesians 5:1-2). Our summer preaching series, “Walking by Faith,” continues today as we consider Paul’s word for our walking in faith under the theme, “Christ’s Copy Cats.” May the Lord’s rich blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus’ sake.

To copy someone is to imitate them, and this is the word Paul uses here: “imitators.” The original word here is *μιμητής*, where we get our word “mimic.” Paul calls upon us to mimic, to imitate God, and what he means here is that as children of God we are to follow God’s fatherly will, showing through our words, our actions, our manner of life that we are God’s children. This doesn’t mean that we are trying to make ourselves equal to God, but with the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us we strive to follow the example of God’s pardoning love, his compassion, his wisdom and justice. To be imitators of God, to be Christ’s “copy cats,” means obedience to the word and will of the Lord in our individual lives as believers and in our collective life as the Body of Christ. This is the clear message of Scripture throughout the New Testament as John writes: **“Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. He who does good is of God; he who does evil has not seen God”** (3 John 11). Specifically and repeatedly, Paul asks believers to look at his own life and follow his personal example of faith: **“Brethren, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us”** (Philippians 3:17; see also 1 Corinthians 4:16 and 11:1, 1 Thessalonians 2:14).

That seems kind of risky on Paul’s part, doesn’t it - to hold himself and his own life up as a model for other Christians to follow? What about the gaps between the ideal and the reality? Were there any aspects of his life that Paul wouldn’t have wanted others to emulate? Maybe, but the truth is that we need concrete, real-life examples of faith to imitate so we know how to follow God. What does this look and how do we do it? Paul is willing to take this bold step forward and allow his own life, imperfect as that surely was, to be a witness to others so they could be copy cats, not so much of him but of God, and of God in Christ Jesus. Who are our examples and models for our own lives today? Who are the people whose life and witness in Christ are worthy of copying? I ask you to give this serious consideration. That individual may be someone who is a family member who influenced us greatly when we were young, giving direction and purpose to our life. That individual may be someone whose silent witness was in deeds, not words, who lived out daily what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Just this past week, I had a conversation with someone who told me of how he was deeply influenced as a boy by his grandmother’s example as she sat at the table, reading her worn and tattered German Bible, silently mouthing the words she was reading. She may not have realized what a profound impact she had upon her

grandson! As Christ's copy cats, we need such godly examples because they build us up in the faith, they inspire us, they move us to deeper and more consistent discipleship in following the Savior. Who are our models for following the Savior?

Paul describes this faith we are called to imitate and tells us what it looks like: putting away falsehood and speaking the truth to our neighbors; being angry but not letting that anger lead us into sin; stealing must give way to work that will support those in need; having holy conversation that builds people up rather than tearing them down; not grieving the Holy Spirit; ridding our lives of things that pull us away from God – bitterness, angry outbursts, wrath, the cry of strife, slander and whatever is bad. In place of these things, God's people are to be godly and Christ-like: tenderhearted, forgiving others as God in Christ has forgiven us, even as we pray in the Lord's Prayer.

This is what it means to be imitators of God – a pretty tall order. On our own, we're not capable of doing this. We will most assuredly fall short of imitating God, and if others choose to imitate our own example of faith, they will most assuredly find not only chinks in our armor, but gaping holes where that armor is literally falling apart. It is precisely then, when we realize how deeply flawed and sinful we truly are, how far short we fall of God's great design and purpose for our lives, that we need to hear how **"... Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God"** (Ephesians 5:2). Our imitating of God comes only as a response to all that God in Christ has done for us. In giving his very life on the cross for us, Jesus has become the aroma of faith for us. Magazines carry perfume and cologne rub-and-sniff ads. They try to tell us what beauty or fashion or glamour smells like. But what is the smell of believing? What is the aroma of faith? It is that sweet-smelling gift of Jesus on the tree of the cross, doing for us what we could not do for ourselves, sacrificing his life in our behalf, paying the penalty for our sins. And so we follow him; we imitate him. We are Christ's copy cats. Amen.