**Ephesians 5:1-10**

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. **2** And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. **3** But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. **4** Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. **5** For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous ( that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. **6**  Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. **7** Therefore do not become partners with them; **8** for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light **9** (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), **10** and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

**“Fragrance Of Christ”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Most recognize that big events in life affect us. They can be the positive things like a graduation, marriage, a birth, or some other celebration. They can also be the negative things like divorce, a death, a loss of employment, or an unforeseen circumstance. As much as the big events can shape us, the more ordinary and routine activities show life as it is. Having to eat, pick out clothes, maybe get the kids off to school, deal with people at work, pay bills, check up on the news, and even have some casual conversation. Most in our fast-paced society have enough to deal with in whatever a day brings.

When St. Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians, it was not in glory like the past. Previously, Paul had faced a riotous mob in their city that stood against him. Now this apostle was merely writing to them while in prison at Rome. He knew those in Ephesus dealt with the daily grind of living in a major commercial center for trade. Yet, despite his dismal situation, Paul made the sacrifice to send words of encouragement to these saints. They were to know that their sacrifices were not useless. Instead, God was at work in their lives as promised by the Gospel. It remains the same today for us as the baptized. The sacrifice of Christ fills our lives with His fragrance of love that is pleasing to God and is good for others.

This fragrant love of Christ fills our life with rest in Him who loved us. “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.” To imitate God is first to understand the fact that God is love. This already takes place in creation where good and bad alike receive blessings from God for life. However, to be his “beloved children” means we have received a far greater promise given by baptism. St. Paul said, “And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” In other words, rather than love residing in our works it rests on faith in the generous gift from God. Jesus alone makes us acceptable and beloved children for His love has come from the Father. Sinners cannot please God by works for as St. Paul says, “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20).

To rest in the fragrant sacrifice of Christ takes us to the Old Testament. There we find plenty of sacrificing going on but God sent prophets, like Jeremiah, to turn the hearts of His people to believe in Him rather than what they were doing. Christ has now silenced all the works of men, even what God commanded of sacrifice long ago. Luther says, “Now all sacrifices are powerless but that of Christ himself; he is the sweet-smelling savior…Therefore, all sacrifices offered in the mistaken notion that they profit for us, or even secure forgiveness of sins, are wicked and unsavory” (Postils Vol. 4 pg. 152). The ultimate offering of Jesus on the cross, also declares all His works to be glorious acts of love. Whether humbling Himself to be of the Virgin Mary, turning water into wine, calming a storm for fearful disciples, healing the sick or casting out demons. His whole life was a fragrant offering to the Father able to cover a multitude of sins.

This fragrant love of Christ fills our life with a smell different from the world. His forgiveness has removed the stench of sin and judgment before God. Yet, while Paul sat in prison with the smell of his sorry situation, how clearly did he show concern for the Ephesians. They were susceptible to stink worse from what surrounded them! It was to wreak with the filth of the sinful world that lived for selfish gain and pleasure. “For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.” Rather than just exposure to the false ways of the Gentiles in daily life, Christians were subject to temptation that arose out from their old sinful self. This was to fall back into ways no longer needing the promise of baptism, the love revealed by God’s Word, and at last the sacrifice given by Christ.

To have the fragrant love of Christ fill our lives is a battle. The saint and sinner in us wages on until death. It is the daily call for each to return to baptism. Since the Devil’s kingdom cannot be divided unless it falls, we must be on guard. There is false living that has no love in it just as empty words justify it all with the Devil’s deception. Our baptism offers the answer against the temptations of our flesh and a world shrouded in darkness. Repent and live under Christ for life is in Him and His words are never empty. What smells pleasing to God, which is to forgive, restore, and save stinks to those living in sin-filled selfishness. Word and Sacrament holds out the fragrance of Christ to fill our lives. Rather than partaking in the dead ways of man, turn to partake of The Man judged by God whose life is a ransom for many. “For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.”

This fragrant love of Christ fills our life with sacrifices and offerings toward others. What is big to God never appears impressive or essential in the sight of men. To share Christ to troubled and terrified souls is what receives praise from our Father in heaven. Likewise when our Lutheran Women in Mission, seek to offer up loose change one day at time, those mites become awful mighty to God who loves a cheerful giver. The same is true when handing out Bibles and Catechism to sow Christ deep into the children’s lives or when giving attention and praying for our confirmands. How do any of us expect to walk as Children of the light unless we discern the darkness by God’s Word? Jesus promises, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” The world sees this useless as it tries save itself, but works of faith, love for the saints, and acts of mercy stand out with a glorious witness in the cross.

Sacrifices and offerings are nothing other than the fragrant love of Christ spilling over into our lives. It may be greater for some than others, but all will have this fruit in their life that is good, right, and true. As one person describes it, “While the Scriptures do encourage spiritual growth, that growth is never anything but growth into Jesus Christ. It doesn’t matter if it’s the day we’re baptized or the day we pass from this world, we are nowhere else but in and of the body of Christ.”[[1]](#footnote-1) It is never about what to do, but who you are! As dear saints and beloved children of the Father, we are confronted every day with sin, death, and the Devil. Sometimes is it big, but most of the times it is just the daily grind of life. God is at work in you because He alone saves you. The sacrifice of Christ fills our lives with His fragrance of love that is pleasing to God and is good for others. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

1. http://birdchadlouis.wordpress.com/2014/10/01/butt-prints-in-the-sand/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)