



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Second Sunday in Lent (C) – Philippians 3:17-4:1

Focus: *Finding Role Models*

word of life

“Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us.” Philippians 3:17

Read Philippians 3:17-4:1

Paul is a missionary, preacher, and teacher who cares deeply for his students. In the previous verses, Paul clearly announces his singular goal of the “heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:14 NRSV) He presses onward and strives to keep Christ foremost in his life and actions. Not that Paul has achieved perfection, but he strives with every fiber in his body to do so. Paul writes, “Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” (Philippians 3:12 NRSV)

This urgent tone of Paul continues as he invites his brothers and sisters in Christ to imitate himself and observe others who are striving to keep Christ central in their lives. Paul wants to be a role model for the Philippians as they mature in faith. Keep in mind that Paul writes this letter to the Philippians while he sits in prison. Most likely, Paul has a certain degree of credibility with the Philippians. His pursuit of Christ has not been without difficulty. Paul hasn’t just spoken words about Christ, he has walked the talk—even when it led to persecution and imprisonment.

1. *What do you know about Paul?*
2. *What attributes of Paul are worth imitating?*
3. *What are the dangers (if any) of imitating another human being?*
4. *How might it be helpful to have a person like Paul to imitate?*

Paul is keenly aware of others who claim themselves to be ardent followers of Christ, but “live as enemies of the cross of Christ.” (Philippians 3:18 NRSV) It is unclear if Paul knew these individuals from his visit to Philippi. But whether he knew them or not, the situation brought Paul to tears.

Instead of striving for the goal of God’s heavenly call in Christ Jesus, these individuals chased the god of the “belly”—unbridled sensual pleasures and earthly things.

5. *Compare and contrast earthly and heavenly pursuits.*
6. *What does it mean to have the “belly” be our god?*

Although the Philippians were Roman citizens, Paul reminds them of their true citizenship in heaven with Christ. The trappings of culture can seduce us, but Christ is ready to transform us. That transformation is where true glory comes. Paul appeals to the Philippians to stand firm in their faith. He writes out of a deep love for the Philippians. These are not words from a stranger, but are written by someone who knows them and desires the best for each of them. “Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.” (Philippians 4:1 NRSV)

7. *Why is this good advice for Christians today?*
8. *Is it easier to imitate someone who loves you and is invested in you? Explain your answer.*

Word among us

Celebrities, professional athletes, and music superstars! How did they become role models?

Today—like never before—we have access to details of the personal life of famous people. Some celebrities choose to twitter their every move and thought. If the desire is to imitate a celebrity, it's not difficult to do.

1. *When you were young, who was your role model?*
2. *Why did you choose that person to imitate?*

Being a role model includes a certain amount of responsibility and maturity. Time and time again, we hear of celebrities apologizing for not being a good role model. Sometimes, their fame came too early and they needed time to grow up. Unfortunately, their mistakes were broadcast around the world.

There is nothing wrong with having a role model. In fact, Paul urges Christians to imitate himself. He offers to be a role model for those who want to follow Christ. Since the church in Philippi had personally met Paul, that suggestion might have been well-received.

But we live over 2000 years after Paul in times vastly different than the first century. Imitating Paul might be more of a challenge for us.

3. *How has the society changed since the first century?*
4. *Do you think it is easier or harder to follow Christ today than in the first century?*
5. *Despite having never met Paul, how might we imitate him?*

faith practice in daily life

Hear the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper

It is important for Christian role models to recognize their own limited understanding of Christ. No matter the amount of one's scholarship or chronological age, there is more to grasp, understand, and comprehend. Christians are left marveling at the new ways Christ is revealed to us. Knowing Christ is an ongoing process through our life.

It's just too easy to forget God and pursue our own pursuits. Sometimes the troubles of this life can be overwhelming, but we can be renewed in faith by the witnesses of mature Christians who humbling live in Christian community and continually discover and re-discover implications of their baptism.

6. *Who have you met that you would like to imitate?*
7. *What guidance would you give a young person in choosing a role model?*

Prayer

Christ, thank you for the witness of Paul and other mature Christians. Help us stand firm and follow your ways. Teach us to be wise when selecting people to imitate.

last word

Select a Christian to imitate today.