

## **WANTED: IMITATORS OF GOD**



**Scripture:**

**Psalm 130**

<sup>1</sup>Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD. <sup>2</sup>Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

<sup>3</sup>If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? <sup>4</sup>But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

<sup>5</sup>I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; <sup>6</sup>my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

<sup>7</sup>O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. <sup>8</sup>It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

**Ephesians 4:25-5:2**

<sup>24</sup>and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

<sup>25</sup>So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. <sup>26</sup>Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup>and do not make room for the devil. <sup>28</sup>Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. <sup>29</sup>Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. <sup>30</sup>And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup>Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, <sup>32</sup>and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

<sup>5</sup> <sup>1</sup>Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, <sup>2</sup>and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

**This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!**



I really like that line, “do not make room for the devil!” Have you had anyone in your life give you that advice? That sounds like something my Grandma Vogt would say.

Paul was a straight talker. He told it like it was. He knew the capability for evil of humans, too. In his past, Paul had been a severe persecutor of Christians. As a result of

his transformation, he could now speak authentically and didn't hesitate to say hard things because his motivation was for the glory of God, not for his own glory

### **PAUL'S PURPOSE**

Paul's purpose in this letter was to train disciples of Christ and help them be good ambassadors for Jesus in the world like he was.

That is still our call too.

Are you a good ambassador for Jesus? Would people know you are Christian by your love as in the *One in the Spirit* song?

Paul lists all the ways the Christians are to demonstrate, in their lives, that they are imitators of God.

We are to speak the truth, put away falsehood (which is like telling them to "stop being fake! Be real with one another.)

It might surprise you when he says, don't worry about when you are angry; it's okay, but when you are angry, don't let it last too long. He is talking about righteous anger, for example when you are advocating for social justice or being abused. And he knows the human psyche. All of us get angry sometimes.

### **DON'T LET THE DEVIL JUMP IN**

But he warns about the devil jumping in and taking advantage of an angry state of mind. We see that too often. Isn't that true? The shooters in the schools, the older man who shot from windows in Las Vegas, the bank robbers, the drunk drivers, all were likely to be angry about something not going right in their lives. So they decided to be reckless and hurt others to act out their anger. That makes the devil very happy when that happens. When we don't control our emotions and let them get carried away, people leave the church, people get hurt, people say things they should not have said. (Hence, the image on page one.) Stop to think, count to 10 before you speak and act.

**Then Paul goes on to say to share your fairly earned resources with others, give grace through your words, and build up one another. Be kind, tenderhearted, and especially forgiving. After all this, then you will have become close to imitating the character of God which is summed up in a four letter word: LOVE.**

### **WHO DO YOU KNOW?**

Who do you know that is a good imitator of God? We should be trying our best daily! Is there anyone in your life now? What do they do that makes them seem God-like to you? Are they merciful, wise, understanding and generous? All of us are called to be imitators of God.

### **GRANDMA VOGT**

After my mother here of course, my adopted Grandma Vogt was the closest thing to God to me as a child growing up. She was our neighbor, two farms down the road from ours. Olga was her first name. If you saw the movie *Pocahontas* you might remember the Grandma Willow God-like character. That image of the wise and peaceful Grandma Willow reminds me of my Grandma Vogt.

She lived to be one-hundred-three. Mom and I would always stop to pick her up and take her to church ever since I can remember.

Grandma grew up in Germany and came over on a boat at age sixteen to become a citizen of the United States, but first she had to be what was called an "indentured servant" for seven years.

A nice farmer in Iowa arranged for her to come over to work on his farm. She remembered being on that big boat coming across the Atlantic alone at age sixteen. But once she got to the farm, there she met her future husband who also was an indentured servant from Germany. His name was Hans.

After working seven years, for a wedding gift, the farmer gave them sixty acres of his land to build a house and to farm. So that is the farm that was nearby where we were living in Iowa.

I could walk there because it was all downhill. But uphill going back home was tough. Hot gravel roads are no fun to walk on.

Grandma was in her eighties when Mom asked her to babysit me when Mom went back to school and developed her own business. The school bus would drop me off at Grandma's door instead of my home. Grandma was like God to me because she was kind of chubby, soft, gentle, and wise. She spoke with a strong German accent but she was easy to talk to. She had a garden with rhubarb and strawberries that she combined into amazing pies! Her chocolate chip cookies were always made with lots of eggs because she raised chickens. Her oatmeal always had cinnamon and brown sugar in it and every time I stayed overnight there she would make fluffy pancakes or oatmeal for me in the morning. I loved Grandma because she took care of me, taught me how to play Rummy, and told me stories about what it was like to grow up in Germany.

**She never got angry  
or raised her voice.  
Her demeanor exuded peace despite  
growing up in a life of hardship.  
Struggles can either  
make or break you.  
They strengthened Grandma Vogt  
because she had a strong faith.**

She escaped Germany before Hitler was taking over the country. But one of her two boys entered World War II to fight as an American soldier and got captured.

He spent two years in a terrible concentration camp where he nearly starved to death. Grandma took care of her son, Don, after he returned from the war. Don never

married. And I remember I thought he was odd because he almost never spoke; he rarely said a word. Don died at age seventy. Grandma used to say that mothers are not supposed to outlive their children. It was hard on her to lose Don who had basically sacrificed his life in World War II. I imagine it was hard on God to lose his son Jesus when he sacrificed himself for us.

## SOME QUESTIONS

In the bulletin today, I gave you an insert with a few questions on it. Even if you are not a journal writer, it is good to take a few moments to ponder these questions for your soul.

Here are the questions. Please take a few minutes to answer these either in writing or mentally.

### **Wanted: Imitators of God, reflection:**

- Jesus loves me this I know. How do I really know?
- Jesus said, "I am the Bread of life." Who is Jesus to you?
- Who are you to Jesus?
- What part of God's character do you try to imitate the most?
- What part of God's characters is the most difficult to imitate? Why?

*"Speak truth, put away falsehood, be angry but not forever, do not steal, work for your resources and share them, think before you speak, speak kind words to build up others, be tender hearted, and forgiving (with no bitterness), Love like Jesus."* (From Ephesians 4: 25-5:2)

Anyone want to share a brief comment or insight from your reflections on these questions?

## JIMMIE CARTER

Jimmy Carter was interviewed about his faith recently and they asked him some similar questions. He said one of his favorite verses to teach in his Bible study at his church is Georgia is from our passage today. He

emphasizes Ephesians 4:32: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you."

**President Carter said, "Forgiving is a challenge....The next step in the evolution of human beings has to be learning how to live with each other in peace and with some degree of love. Jesus said we should not only love our neighbor but to love our enemies, which means loving those with whom we disagree. We have to learn how to get along with Russians, Muslims, and North Koreans in a constructive spirit of care instead of looking for an excuse to have to go to war with them."**

And I leave you with President Carter's words about what he thinks is the most misunderstood aspect of Christianity. He said there is a misconception that Christianity is a restraining factor on life with lots of restrictive rules. Carter looks at his Christian faith as liberation because it gives him a sense of hope for the future and a sense of confidence. Carter believes those who get involved in religion are those who are less arrogant, more humble, and have an understanding of interdependence on one another.

And what will President Carter say when he sees God face to face? He said his words will just be full of gratitude for the blessings he has had in this life. Can you guess what President Carter's favorite hymn is? *Amazing Grace*. Not surprising... Amen.

### **Benediction:**

**This is a Prayer of St. Francis attributed to St Francis of Assisi who lived in the thirteenth century. It is a wonderful one to memorize.**

**Lord, make me an instrument  
of your peace.  
Where there is hatred  
let me sow love.  
Where there is injury, pardon.  
Where there is doubt, faith.  
Where there is despair, hope.  
Where there is darkness, light.  
Where there is sadness, joy.  
O Divine Master,  
grant that I may not seek  
to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood, as to understand;  
to be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that  
we are pardoned.  
And it is in dying, that we are born  
to eternal life. Amen.  
And may the grace of our Lord Jesus  
Christ, the love of God and the  
fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with  
you now and forever more. Amen**



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