

Live Like Jesus
Romans 12:9-21

What do your actions tell your neighbors, your friends, and your family? When I was in high school, I wasn't always the best behaved kid. I had trouble sitting still. I had a hard time listening and focusing. I thought girls and joking with friends was much more interesting than biology and accounting. I got in trouble. I remember that it didn't always phase me or change my behavior when I got in trouble. I'd shake off the scolding, do my time in detention or the principal's office, then go back to doing the same old things. It wasn't until a teacher spoke these words to me did I realize that my actions affected more than just me. Mr. Felton, my health teacher, leaned over me at my desk and said "your bad behavior reflects more on who your parents are than who you are being right now." That made me pause. It made me think. How does this guy know what my parents are like? Who is he to make that statement about them? But there it was, there were his words hanging there demanding that I engage them. I didn't want to be a poor representative of my family. I didn't want people to think the rest of my family was just as obnoxious and rambunctious as me. I hadn't thought about my actions in that light, through that lens before. So I straightened up.

As I read Paul's words for us in Romans this last week, it was like Mr. Felton was standing over me again. It was like a shaming, guilt driven deep by the words of Paul that made me think about what I've done and what I've left undone. Maybe you felt some of that guilt too, like a shadow creeping in over your conscience, as I read from this epistle. There are a lot of imperatives in the assigned verses for today. We see a lot of things we should be doing. He rattles off a long list of things Christians should be doing on a regular basis and I don't know about you but at least a few of those things speak directly to me. I want to speak plainly about these things today. I want to address them and let those words impact your hearts as well. You may not like me after the message today but I am only regurgitating the calls of Paul for us to live like Jesus. He wants us to live like children of our Heavenly Father because when we don't it is a poor reflection on Him.

We have too many wishy washy Christians today. There's a common phrase that you all know that goes something like this. "If you give them an inch, they'll take a mile." Well, we Christians today have given the devil an inch and he's taken as much as he possibly can and left us for dead. We give in to the culture in little ways and then find ourselves miles from God's word. We decide to take a break from holy living only to find ourselves far off the path Christ has laid before us. Hear Paul's words and let them burrow their way into your heart and soul. He is calling all of us to repentance. He is calling us to change our ways. He's calling us to reflect the light and love of our Heavenly Father. He's calling us to live in harmony with one another. He's calling us to live like Jesus. We can't piece together our own moral code. We can't pick and choose what we should or shouldn't do according to the gospel of self or society. We can't justify our disobedience by pointing to the misdeeds of others. We can't dismiss God's call to holy living just because we don't feel like it or we'll be mocked if we do. Hardened hearts aren't an excuse either. So you can ignore me today if you'd like. You can point to the person in the other pew and believe its only for them if you really want to. But these words are for each of us, all of us. These words are for you. Humble yourself and hear how God wants you to change and live like Christ.

The list Paul goes through is extensive. Our love for people should be genuine, not just because we can benefit from a relationship. We need to be disgusted by evil, instead choosing good in all circumstances. We should be outdoing each other in respecting one another. We shouldn't be lazy in our spiritual lives. Many still have a hard time just turning on a livestream let alone showing up to worship. We need to be happy for those who are successful. We need to stop and weep with those who are suffering. We aren't better than anyone else. Instead we are the ones who should sit with the lowly and forgotten. We aren't responsible for taking revenge. That is God's job. We should be people who are known for their forgiveness. If people are hungry, we feed them. If people are thirsty, we give them something to drink. Don't let evil overcome you. Overcome the evil you see in yourself and the world with good. These are the

things Paul emphasizes for us and I think you can summarize it simply this way: live in harmony with one another.

Now, I'm not going to walk up and down the aisles, calling out each of your sins today. I pray that just like Paul the scales are falling off your eyes and you are seeing them for yourselves. But in case you are having trouble, here are some things to think about. Do you hate people who don't share the same political ideology as you? I'm friends with some of you on facebook. You can't hide. Do you hate our president? Do you hate the speaker of the house? Do you find yourselves so immersed in the news cycle and its commentary that you can't see people on the other side as human? Does it leave you angry and bitter? Live in harmony with one another. Do you have a problem with forgiveness? I've heard members of this congregation say "I will never forgive you." We've had people say it louder with their actions, refusing to sit with others, look at others, commune with others. Live in harmony with one another. Do we truly hate the evil things of this world or do we make excuses for them? Racism. Murder. Abortion. Pornography. Violence. "I know it's wrong but..." Do you put aside your agenda and just weep with those who are weeping? Are you happy for those who have been successful or do you sit with jealousy, like a toxin infecting your soul? Do you sit in silence as evil continues to win or do you speak up with the good gospel of Jesus in this culture of destruction and death in which we find ourselves? Stop and think about it. Think about your choices, your behavior. We make all kinds of justifications for our sin. What sin are you justifying? What do your actions tell your neighbors, your friends, your family about your Heavenly Father? Are you living like Jesus in all aspects of life?

In the gospels, Jesus gives an extreme teaching to relay a real point about these things. During the sermon on the mount Jesus says, "And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell." Let's modernize it shall we? If your facebook newsfeed causes you to sin, log off. For it is better that you not know the latest tasty recipes and social gossip than to enter hell. If your news media intake causes you to sin, turn it off. For it is better that you be in the dark on current events than to enter into hell. If your obsession with club sports or extra curriculars causes you to sin, cut them off. It's better to be team-less and in worship than to enter hell. If your phone causes you to sin. If your friends cause you to sin. If your boyfriend or girlfriend causes you to sin. If your self righteousness or sense of justice and revenge causes you to sin. Whatever causes you to sin. Get rid of it. Stop it now. See it in your life and cut it off.

Live in harmony with one another. Be at peace with each other. Love one another. Not whatever it is you are doing now because relationships are crumbling, people are watching and you are showing them that the church is a joke, a hobby for when you're bored, a social club that has no impact on your daily devotion and routine. What does your life say about God? What does our church look like to those who wish to see the true grace and love of Jesus? Live as if today impacted eternity for you and for those around you. Live like Jesus. I told you that you might not like me after saying what I have to say today. But I'm saying it because God has put it on my heart. He has laid the crushing realities of the law on my shoulders. I feel guilt for what I have done. I am convicted by this. I'm not above all of this. I have done wrong too. Humble yourselves to recognize it in yourselves. Stop turning a blind eye to your pet sins or the exceptions you've made that allow you to ignore the holy life God is calling you to.

Earlier this week our family had a very rough start to the morning. And when I say "our family", I mean Seth had a rough start to the morning. He was grumpy. He was demanding. He was destructive. I hadn't had my coffee yet. It was just too much. Kids are kids. They are naughty from time to time. As I've admitted, I've done my fair share. We all have our way of punishing I suppose. We decided that the monster formerly known as Seth must need more sleep. It may sound strange but these are some of my favorite moments of being a dad. I took him into his room. He was screaming in my ear, flailing his body in my arms. He knocked my glasses off as he wildly waved his fists around and we sat down. It's not my favorite because I like to punish him. It's my favorite because I get to show him what grace is like. We sit in his room and wait for him to calm down. Then we go through the list of what he has done wrong. I don't do it because I take pleasure in it. I do it so he knows why he is being restrained in my

lap. I do it to show my disappointment, how he has hurt us. I do it because I know he's capable of being better.

Typically, our little conversation ends with tears swelling up in my eyes. We talk about Jesus' love for us even when we do wrong. He apologizes to me. I apologize to him for yelling. We both say, "I forgive you". He gives me a big hug. We agree on what his behavior will look like going forward. Then he runs out of his room, hugs his mom, and apologizes to her, too. Never once was Seth threatened with eviction. Never once was he going to be stripped of the Ahlersmeyer name. Never once was forgiveness not available for him. You know this too. Your love for your children doesn't waver, even when you are disappointed and angry. How much more true is this of our Heavenly Father? He knows our sins, even the ones we hide. His heart breaks when we rebel. But his arms are always open, ready to receive that lost sheep no matter how far it has wandered. No matter what we've done to tarnish his name, he still runs to his prodigal children rejoicing at the sight of them. Regardless of the ways we've sinned, God accepts our pleas for mercy and grants us full pardon and forgiveness. Our status as his children isn't in question so long as we repent and turn to him, away from our sin. Recognize your sin. Recognize how you've disappointed your Heavenly Father. Give those sins over to him and be forgiven. Then, let him release you out into the world to live a new life as his new creation, fully transformed by the grace you have freely received.

If we are to truly live like Jesus then what do his actions show us about His Heavenly Father? His actions show us that God cares about the physical and mental wellness of others. He heals the broken in body and welcomes the broken in spirit. His actions show us that despite our sin, we are a reclamation project worth pursuing. He dies on the cross to absolve us of all sin. His actions show us that death can't even separate us from his love. He comes back to life on Easter morning, conquering death not just for himself but for all who believe and call upon his name. Paul shows us today how to live like Jesus. We are shown how to be a better reflection of our Heavenly Father's love. It may feel like a stern confrontation, listing all that you've done wrong. We confess those sins and apologize for the ways we've betrayed God and his word. But that's not where the story ends. Our gracious God holds us close and shows us the full extent of his grace and mercy. We get to hear our Heavenly Father say, "I forgive you" because of the price Jesus paid on the cross. He throws away the list of wrongdoings. He casts our sin as far as the east is from the west. He hugs us tight and reminds us that we are his. Then, he sends us out with the command "go and sin no more".

We go through this process countless times, but each time the ending remains the same. Forgiveness. Healing. Unconditional grace and mercy. A tight hug with a reminder that we are still his children. Please, today we need to recognize this entire process. We need to search our hearts and find the sin that we refuse to acknowledge. We need to weed out the sinful exceptions we've made in our lives. We need to drop the excuses we've made for refusing to forgive, for the idols we've constructed, for the ways we've chased after the world's values. We need to be willing to acknowledge the sin in our lives, listing it out before our Heavenly Father in confession. Then, and only then, do we hear the comforting reminder that we are forgiven. That Jesus paid for each of those sins. That we no longer need to feel the heavy guilt of those sins. We leave refreshed, renewed, remade in the image of God, pursuing his word and will...until we fail again. This is the cycle of repentance we go through daily. It begins with honesty evaluating where you've failed. It ends with acceptance and forgiveness. It's rough. It's humbling but it is worth it as you look up at your Heavenly Father, wiping away your tears and fears, reminding you that you are his. Amen.