

17 Brothers, join together in imitating me and in paying attention to those who are walking according to the pattern we gave you. 18 To be sure, many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. I told you about them often, and now I am saying it while weeping. 19 Their end is destruction, their god is their appetite, and their glory is in their shame. They are thinking only about earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. We are eagerly waiting for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. 21 By the power that enables him to subject all things to himself, he will transform our humble bodies to be like his glorious body. 4:1 So then, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, in this way keep standing firm in the Lord, my dear friends.

When you want your child to excel in a sport, you can buy videos that show them exactly how to precisely do something. Shooting videos and throwing videos are meticulous in how to hold the ball and release the ball for maximum accuracy and success. When you are a good student it helps you to be good athlete.

The same can ring true when it comes to your finances. I have read several financial books where people have also studied the habits of those who are financially successful. What kind of cars do they buy? Where and how do they invest? They try to learn from the best in order to possibly be the best.

There is some truth to that when it comes to the way we live our Christian lives as well. Paul writes, **“Brothers, join together in imitating me and in paying attention to those who are walking according to the pattern we gave you.”** There are Christian people who exhibit a strong faith and character in life. They don’t just punch the clock of Christianity on Sunday. Their whole lives exhibit faithfulness. Maybe it’s your grandma. Maybe it’s your classmate. How do they get that way? **Pay attention to them.**

Many times you have to do some prying and ask some questions, because you can’t see what goes on behind the scenes. I think of Roger Federer. From 2003 to 2010 he had won Wimbledon six times (including five in a row), five U.S. Opens (all in a row), four Australian Opens and one French Open. But then from ages 29 to 35 he only won one major. People thought he was basically done. He was giving his child a bath when he slipped on the water in the bathtub and tore a meniscus. He had to recuperate from there. But when he healed and came out of recuperation he ended up better than ever, and he did it in his upper 30’s. It made people wonder “how?” They asked him, and come to find out he took that time of recuperation to evaluate his weakness and put extra time into his backhand. His weakness ended up being his strength. So my point is, where did his great backhand come from? It came from pain and practice. How does this apply to spiritual strengths? Sometimes those who are strong at something had to learn it and acquire that strength through weakness and failure and practice. Some of the most patient and loving people you may know were not there thirty years ago. Sometimes it took someone to take them under their wing to show them and emulate a certain behavior or attitude for them. When you study their lives and ask them about it, they might have some insights as to how they got to be that way.

We need more positive examples in our lives! It used to be that a parent or a grandparent would be present to emulate for the child how to pray and how to worship. They would fold the child’s hands and teach the child how to pray. They would set aside time before bed to read through a Bible story. When singing in church, they would open up the hymnal for the child and point to the words so the child could follow along. When they

sang, the parent would smile and encourage them to do so. At home, if someone sees you caring for your parents or taking care of your neighbors, this leaves a lasting impression on them. If they witness a husband and a wife smiling at one another and speaking kindly, it is a great example for the child and for their friends. (Unfortunately, I haven't done a good job of that when it comes to my driving.) We live in such an immature age that now the children witness the embarrassing behavior of their parents and they shake their heads in shame. They need someone to look up to but we aren't thinking of ourselves as role models or even trying to be.

We have a hard time with this sometimes, especially as Lutherans, because we know that we are all sinful. We know that we are not saved by our works. But this doesn't mean that we can't honor someone for having done something bold or something well and commending them for their works. Sometimes the church year has a day set aside for certain saints who have gone before us. It sounds strange to talk about "saints" because we are all saints in God's sight through faith in Jesus. We are all equally forgiven and holy, no matter how strong or weak our lives of faith are. But we need role models! When someone lives a noticeably gracious life, then we should take note of them and pay attention to them. This is what Paul wants!

Take for instance St. Patrick. Legend has it that he used the shamrock to describe the Trinity. So how do we remember him in America? By eating corned beef and drinking green beer and getting drunk. Is this how God would want it? Did you know that "at 16 years of age, Patrick was abducted by pirates and taken to Ireland as a slave. The Celtic pagan tribes who lived in Ireland were Druids. After several years he escaped and returned to Britain, but with a love for the people of Ireland. Patrick did not follow in his dad's footsteps and become a Roman soldier. He felt called to serve the Lord and His Church by being ordained a priest. He went back to Ireland to convert the people who had originally kidnapped him. While there, he became a bishop and was very successful in replacing paganism with Christianity."

<https://www.dummies.com/religion/christianity/catholicism/11-popular-catholic-saints/>

Why not look at Patrick's example and be moved by his bravery and his passion for the Gospel? Sure, he was a sinner, but God also filled him with a great zeal to reach out to lost sinners, a zeal that we should love to emulate. He risked his life to go back to the place that imprisoned him just so they too would know the Gospel.

Think about Paul in today's text. What strikes me is his love for the Philippians and his passion for them to stay faithful and not fall into sin and unbelief. First of all, he calls them "**brothers.**" It's a familial term - the Philippians were like family to him. He had been away from them due to being imprisoned in Rome for over two years. So he concluded this portion by saying, "**So then, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, in this way keep standing firm in the Lord, my dear friends.**" Who of us genuinely feels about other people like that when they aren't even our immediate family? Paul knew that it was difficult for them to stay in the faith amidst the temptations and the persecutions. He wanted to go visit them. So in the meantime he wrote them this letter. He took such joy in their faith. He called them "**my joy and my crown.**" It seems rather dangerous for us to take such joy in other people, because people can let you down. But Paul wasn't afraid to feel that heartache.

Where did his passion come from? His passion came through the effort that he put into the Philippians to teach them about Jesus and pray for them through the process of sharing Jesus with them and bringing them up in the

faith. But that's not all. This takes us to the body of this text today. We look at what made Paul so zealous and compassion about what he did.

To be sure, many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. I told you about them often, and now I am saying it while weeping. 19 Their end is destruction, their god is their appetite, and their glory is in their shame. They are thinking only about earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. We are eagerly waiting for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. 21 By the power that enables him to subject all things to himself, he will transform our humble bodies to be like his glorious body.

His passion came from the cross! We have salvation in Jesus' death for us! Jesus died and rose from the dead, in order to TAKE US TO HEAVEN! He is coming again! We want to be in heaven with Jesus. Paul was passionate about it because he took heaven and hell seriously. He didn't want the Philippians to end up in hell. They had to stay in the faith by continuing to repent of their sins and listen to the Word and receive the sacrament! But many were not living for heaven. They were living for pleasure. Paul was passionate about them not falling into that pattern.

Most of us, if not all of us, lack the zeal and the passion of Paul. Why is that? We might think of the world being our greatest danger or the devil, but one of the greatest battles that we have is with our own stomachs. When Paul spoke of the "stomach", he was talking about the place from which our emotions and passions come from. Paul used this same term in 1 Corinthians 6 where he wrote,

"Everything is permissible for me"—but I will not be mastered by anything. 13 "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food"—but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.

Paul associated the stomach with the desire for food and for sex. Do not let your life be driven by these things - what kind of foods you are preparing or what kind of new drinks you can try out. Don't let your life be driven by your passions for sex. It isn't limited to those things. It could refer to anything when it comes to your body. Fitness could become your god. Tattoos could become your god. Retirement and vacations can become your god. Beware of both extremes: to the luxuries of life and also to the disciplines of the body when your exercise or your shape becomes your god.

It reminds me of how the Buddhists go to two extremes. They have the overweight Buddha and the skinny one. The body doesn't matter to them, so they go to both extremes. We can do that too! Our bodies matter to us, they are gifts from God. But Paul says, "**Don't be mastered by anything.**" He calls the body ταπεινώσεως. It means to have a "low status," with the implication of humility. Don't worship your passions. Don't let them be your god. It's this passion for the stomach that leads so many astray. They have passions for sports, exercise, entertainment - all of these things that touch their emotions.

Paul said with tears that, "**many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.**" Isn't that interesting how he put that? Perhaps we aren't treating the lifestyle of luxury as the enemy that we should? But at what time does it become a god? When it takes the place of the cross? For sure! When it becomes our goal in life, to be entertained? Sure. It reminds me of an old movie where Russell Crowe was thrown before a crowd of Romans in order to keep them entertained through his fighting. The Emperor thought that by entertaining the people he would keep them from rioting over their miserable lives. And maybe that is Satan's tactic as well. In the midst of suffering

under sin and death, as long as he can keep us entertained, we won't bother to look at the hell we are headed to. We won't see our own stomachs as the enemies, when that is what they can be.

The Gospel lesson for today has Jesus being warned by the Pharisees that Herod wanted to kill him. They told him, "**Leave this place and go somewhere else.**" They wanted Jesus to flee the cross. Jesus wasn't going to be driven by fear, when He knew when and how He would die. basically said, "I'm going to do what I do and go where I'm going to go." And it is interesting when you read on: Jesus went to the house of a prominent Pharisee to eat. Imagine the nice tableware and food they had to eat. People came and sat in the most prominent places and made a show of everything. It was all about the luxuries of life, until Jesus confronted their behavior and their craving for attention. It was a good old boys club where they all patted each other on the back. Their religion was only making them lazy and complacent in life. Jesus rebuked them over their hypocrisies and even embarrassed them, knowing they would end up crucifying Him for it. But that's what He came to do; to die for the sins of the world. He wasn't going to run from that cross. Thank God for His single minded focus on doing what He came to do! Without the cross we would be damned!

Paul says, "**Brothers, join together in imitating me and in paying attention to those who are walking according to the pattern we gave you.** How can we imitate them? By remembering that we have been set free from sin by Jesus, so that we could go to HEAVEN. We remember that our bodies are weak. We remember at the resurrection they will be strong again. So instead of being so worried about what to put into our decaying mouths, why not be more concerned about what we put into our eyes and our ears? Who do you want to emulate? How do you want to live? Like a sports hero, or like your heroes in the faith?

Thousands of children will go to watch Captain Marvel this weekend to learn about a make believe girl that has flaming hands and hair. They will buy her outfits and act like they are flying around the house. They will be temporarily entertained, just like we were when we were young. It's ok, as long as we keep it in perspective.

Don't forget about the real world we live in, with real demons and real temptations and a real God and a real eternity of heaven and hell. Why not come back to reality and find a real hero? Look at Paul. Look at Peter. Look at Jeremiah. Look at Patrick. Pick a faithful grandmother or a fellow member. Study them. Find out what gave them strength. Most importantly, keep finding that the way of salvation is not through strength and power, but through weakness and suffering, as we cling to our Savior and our Hero Jesus for forgiveness and salvation. Amen.