

Calvary United Methodist Church
August 12, 2018

FOLLOW GOD'S EXAMPLE
Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher

Children's Message:

Ephesians 4:32

I invite our children to come forth for the Children's Message. Welcome. Good morning. Are you all having a good week? Even with the little bit of rain once and a while are you still having some fun times? That's good.

I want to speak today about some very important things that God tries to share with all of us and you can watch one of these screens around here to see what it's about. I am going to look at the one ahead.

One of the words that God tells us to do is to be kind and to be compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just in Jesus in Christ, God forgave you. Now, that's a lot of words, but I think we could show a lot of this through photos, so I want you to help me.

When you see that photo, what kind of feelings do you feel inside? Happy, or sad, or what kind of feelings do you get when you are looking at a photo like that? Do you think they are happy? They are smiling, anyway, right? Does that make you feel good when you see other people that are happy? Are you happy with that? Yeah. When I see other happy people it makes me feel happy inside. It's kind of a great thing. And happiness is a good thing to share.

Now when I see photos like this, what happens when you see a photo like that? They are not so happy. Have you ever been like that? A little bit. You know what? I've seen some of these folks out here and they have seen me like that. And I have probably seen in my own family there are days where we just aren't real happy, are we? You might be picking...do your parents every say, "Quit picking on your brother or sister?" Do you ever do that? We sort of pick little fights and stuff. And that doesn't make us really nice folks when we're like that. But we all have those moments.

And then there are photos like this: when I see someone like this I want to giggle because, you know what? I think they are beyond happy. They are having fun and I like to have fun. I think fun is a great thing.

But once in a while in my travels around home here or in my family or other places I go I see someone like this and I'm wondering, did someone make fun of them? You've heard bullies? People make fun of us. Sometimes I'm wondering are they sad because maybe they are sick or maybe something happened in their family? Maybe they lost someone they love? And maybe they are poor and they can't go to school. And I know some of you are wrestling, "Oh, I don't want to go to school right now," but a lot of people like to go to school and maybe they just

don't have...and sometimes when I see photos like that I feel so sad when I look at other people and they are crying, whether someone made fun of them or they are hurt or they got into trouble.

And God's Word is telling us when He talks about loving and forgiving and being compassionate...when I see a photo like this it makes me happy because, you know why? Even though someone is sad, what does it look like the girl bending over is doing? (Child speaks.) Maybe saying, "Do you want to play with me?" That would be a fun thing. "Because I see you are upset and I want to be your friend." It's kind of a nice thing, isn't it?

And when we see that, it's a reminder to us to share. There are going to have to be a lot of strangers out there when you go to school and other places because God's Word tells us that we ought to be kind. Be kind means we kind of share when we see someone else having a bad day, we want to make their day better. Because we've all had bad days, right? Everybody out there has had bad days, right? And so when we have those bad days, isn't it much better when we have a friend to laugh with. Or when we are having a bad day and a friend says...I'm not very good at math. Do you want a list of all the subjects I'm not good at? There's a lot of them. But when I was in school I had good friends and some of the things I could help them with and some things they helped me. And that made me feel very happy when we help out each other in our times, even when we learn to share.

When we talk about being compassionate, it's a big word. It says: showing concern, understand, warm and loving. So, for instance, if I want to be compassionate and I see someone who just wrecked their bike, what might I do? Help them.

These stories are all though the Bible where Jesus was trying to teach us to help other people. If I was down like that and my mom and dad saw me they would have probably come picked me up and asked me if I was okay, but sometimes if moms and dads aren't around or grandparents or people you know, some of your friends, someone, even a stranger, could come and help you up. That's being kind, it's being compassionate and sometimes when we are compassionate with one another we just love and we laugh and when one of us is happy and one of us is sad, sometimes just being with someone feels good, doesn't it? When I am sad, I like a hug, you know that? When you are sad do you like a hug? It's not for everybody, but it's nice to know that there is someone out there because all of a sudden you start feeling better.

And God's Word tells us that when we start to forgive one another everything gets better. And sometimes we are not really good at forgiving, but God says we have to get better at it.

And then there's this part about making mistakes. Anyone here make mistakes? My list is big. Actually, my pencil doesn't have an eraser on it anymore, I've made so many. Did you ever have days like that? And there are days I think I can't believe I did that. And some of my mistakes aren't just the things I write and type. Sometimes it's things I say or I get mad and I want to...oh, did you ever want to punch somebody? I don't think he's that terrifying, but when I

make mistakes like that and I feel like this and I'm angry, I have some decisions to make.

When people hurt me, I can say, "I forgive you." Did anyone ever say to you, "Forgive me?" or "I'm sorry."? Sometimes sorry is a hard word to say. But if I don't forgive people, this is what happens: I have to say goodbye. I don't like to say goodbye, because when I have to say goodbye to friends, that means if I won't forgive them I can't be around them anymore because they make me mad or they hurt me or sad and there are sometimes people aren't very nice and we need to be away. But we also need to be forgiving and loving and we need to be able to be big enough to say this word sorry because sorry says forgive me.

And then it's a whole new thing. Have you ever done that to your mother or your father or your brother or sister or someone, said, "I'm sorry" and all of a sudden it's like ah.... Everything is okay now. It makes things better.

It's like releasing all the problems, all the tears, all the worries and the water comes in and washes away all the pain and then we walk away from that, I at least, a lot of times feels this: like I have a friend again. Everything is going to be okay. And that's kind of a good thing.

I just like this scripture today that I share with you and I want you to keep one of these reminders, would you pass one of those to your friends there? I want you, each one. It says: Kindness rules: be nice, be true, be kind, care and smile. These are great things as a reminder of this verse from Ephesians: Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you.

God loves you. God wants you to be happy. God wants you to be loving to all people.

Thank you for coming up today. God bless your week.

Message:

Ephesians 4:25-32, 5:11

The past four or five Sundays Pastor Bob has been addressing us from the book of Ephesians and it's Paul letter to a church. The letter is there to encourage the early church, to correct the church and try to get reader onto the right path. And a part of that process was because the early church was made up of those who originally were Jewish folks following the God of Abraham and now they're wandering with these, the non-Jewish believers, who are coming to Christ and they were trying to establish who is who and is one group better than another and the message that came was a reminder to all that God loves all of us, wherever our journey has taken us, where our faults, our failures, our...whatever the problems are, God loves us.

And so the message today is again following in that route from some thousands of years ago, 2000 years ago, when Paul was going around speaking to these churches trying to get them all onto the right path. Paul still speaks to us today, using little vessels like Pastor Bob and Pastor Jeff, to try to share a word. And in the same way when you read that Word. So let us pray for a moment:

Father God, we thank you and pray today for your blessing upon our ears and the message. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to Thee, O Lord, our Redeemer, our Savior, our Lord and our Master. Amen.

Following an example of Christ and following examples in general isn't always easy. I remember this: do you? You see, math wasn't my thing. And I know we have some math geniuses in here; that's not me. And the teacher in Algebra would say, "Now, this is the way it is. Here is your example. If you just fill in the blanks and do the same thing it will work out." I want you to know, it's still at 60 years old, it still doesn't work.

But there is good news: God didn't give us an example like that. He gave us an example like this: The example is in Jesus Christ, the one who was born among us, the one who came in a lowly way, the one whose family had next to nothing, the one who was crucified, he was spat upon, he was mocked, he was terrorized, he was whipped, he was beat and on top of it all he loved, he forgave, he was gracious and he even said to those around him, "Today you will be with me in paradise." That's the example that we are to follow.

And Paul's letter to the church that day and his note to us today is: we are not doing it so well. It's not so surprising because we are broken. But the good news day after day is when I see a photo like this, I'm reminded of my baptism. Baptism is the cleansing, it's the washing, it's the cleaning up of my sins that didn't happen just when I was a young person. It happens daily when I read of God and pray to God and I'm reminded, "Jeff, you are not yet who God wants you to be. God still has some work to do." And God says, He looks at us and says, "Please look to my son. He is the only one, the pioneer, the one who will give you the way and the means to become more godly." To become more godly.

We heard Pastor Bob tell us that at one point Paul had to slow down a bit. He was not the nicest of men all the time. And his time in prison reshaped him. I'm sure quietness and being locked up from others gives you a lot of time to think. I really don't want to go through that. And in that thinking he would put letters together and it was to these churches in Asia Minor, they are spoken of highly in the Bible and I can remember and be reminded in these areas of Turkey and others where people would gather and hear not only in big crowds but in smaller groups the Word of God. To follow this man Jesus Christ, it was a movement that was taking off and it would never be stopped.

And his words were things like encouragement. I'm thinking what is encouragement? It is the act of giving support to someone. It is the confidence, it's the hope we give. We have heard in recent weeks and again this morning Pastor Bob shared, we are a gifted congregation. We are loving. God has given us a facility, but more than the facility, God has given you gifts. We have the power, we have the authority by God to do great things, to lift up this broken world of which we live in and, my dear friends, as we watch the news, it is broken. We need God's witness. We need the light. It's the power to persuade, to do or to continue doing something.

For several thousand years, those who have followed Christ have kept the message going. But something in our culture is dimming the light. The song we sang as children about not letting your light under a bushel, we're covering it up too much. We are tight-lipped Christians. We are not sharing the Good News, we are not sharing the Word of redemption and the ability to change every situation in our life, to know that God can take wherever we are, redeem it into a new place.

It's also the act of trying to stimulate the development of an activity state or belief. Folks, this nation and the world of which we live is a communion of God worldwide. God doesn't love just Americans or people of certain sects or groups. Whether people identify with Jesus Christ, whether they know him or not, I want you to tell this: God loves us. God loves every single person. We are created in God's image.

And then there are those days when Paul would speak to the others. He had this anger problem, have you ever had that? Now, it takes a real bunch of stuff to get me really angry, but I get mad anyway. And when we are mad we aren't usually the people we want to be. Are you ever like that? We are not the people we want to be and to that we need to be reminded that Paul was once the one who looked for those who were followers of Christ to have them actually imprisoned, crucified or do whatever until he had that light experience, the walk on Emmaus, when Paul said, "I need to be more loving and I need to share this story about being kind."

And this Word today tells us it doesn't cost a lot to be kind. It takes a little humility. Sometimes it takes sucking up the things, the hurts and pains that have come our way. But it means a lot for the Gospel of Jesus Christ when you and I are kind. And it means a tremendous amount when people around us who are already broken do not see us respond with anger and abuse and neglect, but rather see us respond in love to the point that some people are shocked that we can be so loving.

I was just on vacation and I met a family who has taken in over 200 children over 35 years that were thrown away by their families. Some of the children they have for a year or two years or three years, some of them are special needs. And they said you cannot be the transformation of children who are crying and not happy that when you love them, you hug them, you embrace them, you feed them and show them that daily, how their life changes. Wow! 200 lives changed. 200, by sharing God's love.

Tells us: if you are angry, do not sin; do not let the sun go down while you are still angry and do not give the devil a foothold. There is so much anger in our world and there is no need for it. We are blessed. Can you say that in your own mind? I'm blessed. To know it! I remember going through science museums and there are some in Philadelphia and even here in Harrisburg at the time where they have those distortion mirrors. I actually think someone put one in my home, you know they make you look bigger. Some of them make you look taller, they make you look skinnier, whatever. I remember these and I know this in my own mind: when

I've had a bad day and I look in the mirror, I'm disgusted, I'm broken. To think I said something I shouldn't have said, acted in some way I shouldn't have acted, behaved in ways because I know that's not the image I want to see in the mirror. I want people to see Jesus Christ. Now, I know we are going to fail, we are not going to do that every day. It would sure be nice if we would try pretty hard at it. To be like Jesus, that someone can look at us and see Christ.

I want to remind you, I'm not a doomsday prophet at all, but I want to remind you of a couple stories of people who are broken. Anyone remember, what is the story related to this? (People speak.) Yeah, some of you saw it at Sight and Sound, I know. Noah was asked to build a boat because God had pretty much had it. He said these people aren't changing at all and so He decided to start over again.

And then there was another man named (People speak.) Whew! I was thinking I'd get Charlton Heston. Moses was asked by God to come up and he was going to give his people some rules for living called commandments and when he came down he saw the people, even though they knew how they should love God, what had happened? They already switched gods. They were building idols and he broke the commandments. He was furious.

And I want you...people like my parents...have you ever had this day? Oh, come on now, be honest. Some of the parents are the ones who took you by the arm and the fingernails are into your arm so deep you wonder if you are going to get out of the mall for misbehaving and others are grabbing you by the ear. And why do they do that? It's like these parents: I've had what? (Enough.) Ah, you've been there. I've had enough! And in the world we live in we say that sometimes: I've had enough. And God says to us, I think: I've had enough. I give you my Son, Jesus Christ. I give you love. I give you passion. I give you a wonderful love.

In this nation we have wealth. We don't think it. We complain, but let me tell you, I've seen a little bit. We have homes, we have food, we have abundance, we have shelter, we have healthcare and we complain and God says: Do you remember this? My Son Jesus Christ loves you so much that he gave his life. I've had enough of the complaining. I've had enough of that. Can we be loving, can we be caring, can we be redemptive in this world, because the world we are in is filled with brokenness. It is filled with pain. It is filled with suffering and I need you more than anything to be light.

And as one representing Paul and Jesus Christ today I'm telling you this: there is only one answer for the brokenness of the world. It's Jesus Christ. And if you and I keep it to ourselves, "I'm a Christian and we don't tell anybody, we don't share with anybody, we don't pray with anybody" it's just brokenness.

And I want to tell you as a pastor, I've had enough. I hear complains all the time about this: churches that are empty. What are we going to do about it? I've seen a lot of churches empty and I don't want to again the negative guy, but I work with some of the folks from the conferences trustees. You know in this conference which is just the center part of Pennsylvania we

close ten churches a year. Now, there are a lot of reasons, demographics and all those things, but part of the reason is it's us. We are not light. We are dark. We are complaining. We're negative. We're racist. We're mean. We're ugly. At some point we have to redeem ourselves, confess to Almighty God: I'm not the person I am and I need to change my life. And I need to be...when was the last time you invited someone to this or any congregation to worship? How in the world will those out in the world know to come home to God if we can't even invite...

Remember this program: Cheers? Everyone wanted to go to the bar where everyone what? (Knew their name.) They knew their name. We don't even care to know who are neighbors are anymore.

Years ago when our conference, this is a long time ago, it was up at Bloomsburg, PA, Harold Beck was the speaker and he told this story of an elderly lady in his congregation. She had a parakeet and it was getting more and more difficult to life it off the stand, you know what you have to do, slide out the drawer, clean up all the paper. And so someone recommended to this elderly lady that she start using the mini vacuum. She thought it would be good, and the first day she put it up in the cage and she hears suuuupp. Her parakeet went down the tube. She quickly tore open the vacuum, tore open the bag, grabbed her little parakeet out, covered with dirt, jammed it under the faucet, turned it on and washed it away, and the pastor said, "And how's your parakeet?" She says, "It doesn't sing much anymore. Just sort of sits and stares." And Harold Beck says there is no better description of the church of today.

You see, we are not very excited about Jesus Christ. That's a problem. That's a problem when we can't be excited about the One that loves us.

In one of my past congregations we had a secretary who wasn't a part of the church. She spoke to me at one point. She said, "You know after working here about six years, I don't know if I can ever be part of a Christian community again." She saw the bitterness, the ugliness, the demands, the nastiness, not of the world. Oh, no, not the world. It was us, the Church of Jesus Christ.

You want to know what we look like to the world. Ask some waitresses at restaurants on Sunday if they see people that pray, they don't want to serve them because they will get less tips, demanding more service and more complaints. Remember that mirror I talked about? God is probably shaking His head saying, "Are these really my people? They don't look like my people. I don't know what we are going to do about it. Are they imposters? They don't look like the Son Jesus Christ. Can't they do better? Are they even trying? I love them so much, so abundantly. Are they blind? Do they know my Word? And why don't they want to know me better?"

This is a harsh word. Thank God it's not mine, it's from Paul. He reminds us that if we want to be the light of Jesus Christ we must be people who love. We must be people who forgive. We must be a living example, the walking light. If we are not going to forgive, we are going to

have distances in our marriages, in our relationships, in our friendships and everywhere we are. When Jesus Christ went to the cross, he made the broken heart have a little bit of light, a little bit of hope, that even the man on the cross said, "Today, with our eyes open, you will be with me in paradise." Why? Because he wanted to cast out darkness, cast out the darkness.

So, I'm thinking of the things we do around here in church. Are you casting out darkness? Where are you serving God? In your job? In the little league? Cheerleaders? Band? At the church? Wherever it is, evaluate why you are doing what you are doing and are you doing it for Christ?

I've seen a lot of service in my churches through the years who people do it grudgingly. May I ask this? Stop it. Do you think, for the sake of Jesus Christ, the people you serve don't understand what it is like if you are doing it and you hate them? I have been a food pantries and I've heard people grumble about certain sects of people and groups of people. I have been in other places where we've tried to help people and work camps and on missions and these people are lazy. Do you think people are blind? Either we are Christ and we are the light or we are nothing. God tells us that we've got what it takes. We do. And I know so much because I remember the story of Easter when the people went to the tomb and they were without hope and now, they were believers again. They came.

And then there was Thomas who couldn't believe it unless he saw his Lord and Master and he humbly when he saw the wounds he weeped before his God and said, "My Lord and my Master."

What will it take for you and me to weep again, "My Lord and my Master, I want to follow you with my whole heart? I want to be a disciple who is faithful. I want to take your light into the world. I want to be your light."

And when Jesus left in the ascension, he said this: you, that's you, you, you, you, all of us here, will do greater things than I have done. Greater things, but we need to believe it. We need to believe it and in spite of all that, a lot of times we do diddly. That was a big word in my day: you didn't do diddly today. Why? Because there are a lot of problems in the church today. A lot of times we hear people: Well, you pay Bob and Jeff. They are supposed to do that stuff!

Folks, the world will be dark forever if it's only two people. We are called as ministers all, but we are fighting and bickering and gossiping. We are acting like immature adults. We've had a sign for a long time, Do Something, but that's not enough. We need to do what is required by God. And I can't tell you what that is. You only know. Pray to God. Seek God in the Word. God will tell you. God will speak to you in ways that you will know how to be positive. We need to care for this kingdom and care for the earth, but we need to care for God's children, for God surely must look around in disbelief and shock the way we behave sometimes.

I want to tell you when I look in the mirror, I have problems sometimes letting go of stuff, big mistakes I've made in life. I was in high school, it's hard for me to tell the story, doing what I love best, my work camps. And I came home and I'm sitting at the table with my mom and my dad and my two sisters and I talked about a poor family I worked for and I made a joke. My father asked me to leave the table. God surely has forgiven me for that, I know that. But it's hard for me to forgive and let go of the stupid stuff I've done, because I know better.

God looks at us. I heard a pastor say years ago I don't think God is nearly as angry with us as he is just disappointed. We know better. We know better. We know we ought to be loving. We know we ought to be light. We know we ought to be positive, but we're not doing it because we're not praying, we're not studying, we're not humbling, we're not serving, we're not giving. Not praying. We're too proud to go and ask for prayer when we're in trouble: I don't want other people to know. And we don't like to pray with others and I want to say, you know I've heard all kinds of excuses throughout my ministry. I'm tired of them.

We've learned, when you say you can't pray, not everyone can come up front. I realize that. But you can pray. You can pray. You can pray with your children. If you aren't you should be. How else are they going to learn? You can pray with your partner. You can pray with the sick and the dying. You can pray with those who are going through struggles. When we say we can't pray I like to say: well, you couldn't drive and you couldn't read and you couldn't ride a bike. You learn because you wanted to.

And we need to want God. We don't know God because we don't read God's Word. How will you know where God wants you if you are not reading God's Word?

We've lost humility. We've become demanding people. Believe me, as a pastor I've seen it. When I first came to the church some thirty five years ago, it was a place where I felt, at least in my mind, a very humble place where people wanted to serve God. Church has become a place where people find it like a club: I pay your way and your salary and I want you to do this or that. It's a place where we want served and that's not what the church is about.

The church is about us going into the world. The only reason for this building to exist is for us to come and get fed to go to the world. It's not that we just come back here and have a good time. That's a clubhouse. We're not playing a clubhouse. We are a part of a kingdom that's much better.

And then we get to the giving thing. Oh, not the giving thing. Methodists, according to stats, 1.8 percent of the income. It's amazing, in this coming year, in February, our general conference will be talking about human sexuality. And we have all these people, we've got to do this or that because it's scriptural. There is nothing more scriptural in the Bible than giving. Giving! But when we speak to it you are like Red Foxes back here, "I'm going to have the big one. I'm going to have a heart attack if he mentions that money stuff any more." Right? Why? We live bigger, we live better than anybody in the world, and if you don't believe it

travel with me. And we act like we have nothing, we complain and we moan. Or I get with poor people who are happy, I'm always amazed, because they have so little and yet they have joy and peace. And we have so much and we have discontent because we see and we want more.

God wants us to humble ourselves. This world is a mess and we can't change that mess without your gifts, your service, your humility, all those things. You see, without your gifts, this church will fail. It will fail. We need your gifts to make it happen.

Joshua says this: If serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose yourself this day whom you will serve, whether the God your ancestors served before the Euphrates or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living, but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

And in 2 Chronicles is like it: If my people who were called by name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin and heal them no more.

Folks, we are broken. And we need God. We need to be reminded that we have been washed clean, new, clean slate. Today's it. Many of you have heard the story before that I grew up in a revival time church and for virtually every year of my ministry I had pastors like Don Chiampa and John Melon and Jay Sacks come and speak at revivals because I believe like Billy Graham there comes a time for a decision and a decision is now, today, this moment. You can't just keep putting off deciding to live for Christ. We can't play church. We are called to be the church.

I would like to end my message with a song of Andrea Crouch. It's called, "I'm Coming Home." I pray you just mediate on the words.

I'm coming home. I know it's time I come home to my God.