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***Imitators of God***  
***Ephesians 4:24-5:2***

*clothe yourselves with **the new self**, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*

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

Columnist named David Brooks, wrote a book called,  
***The Second Mountain***.

The idea is very simple---all of us spend time climbing a mountain in life, like success in a career, or family.

This ***first mountain*** is about us, what WE are doing, who WE are, and what WE want.

But then—life hits us, whether we’re 20 or 70— and we are forced to come down the mountain into the ***valleys of life***.

The valley could be a failure of some sort,  
A devastating loss or tragedy,  
An illness or disease.

And that’s where we come to a fork in the road—  
***life can go a couple of different ways***.

As we move through the valley,  
 we can either shrivel up under our pain,  
 allowing it to take over our lives,  
 and turn us into unhappy people.

Or, we can **GROW because of those valleys**,  
 Our hearts and lives can expand—  
 because we've seen how precious life is,  
 because we've seen that life is more than success,  
**Life is about more than a focus on self.**

Ever had that realization?  
 It's humbling, right?

So after the valley,  
 we start to climb **a second mountain**,  
 which is very different.  
 The second mountain is no longer self-focused.  
 It's not about looking good, or getting our way.  
 It's about something **bigger**, something **eternal**.  
 It's about **making commitments**—  
 to people, to community, and to God,  
 and having those **connections**.

Brooks talks specifically about making **commitments**—  
 to a vocation (which is more about your talents),  
 to family or other lasting relationships  
 to faith,  
 and to community.

On the second mountain,  
**We turn away from SELF—and start to focus on OTHERS.**

Brooks believes that there are first and second mountains in whole  
 communities, organizations,  
**even our American society**—which he argues is in a valley right now.

**Why does this matter?**

Well, the pinnacle of the second mountain is a **meaningful life, full of joy**.

Brooks says our whole society suffers without joy right now because we are *so individualistic, self-centered*, preoccupied with our stuff, our power, our way.

***But there is a better way,***

Paul is saying so this morning.

This better way is not about us—It's about all of us *together*.

And it's more than just good circumstances or feelings.

It's about finding that ***JOY!***

Paul is urging all of us to to *let go of the old self*,

a self-focus,

and to put on Christ—a new self, and a new way of life.

That's these verses are today!

***Not just a 'to-do'*** list of rules,

But a ***description*** of life together as Christ-followers.

Paul's words were not written to individuals alone,

***But to a community,***

***About how to live in that community.***

Kind of how the second mountain is about community.

Brooks talks in his book about moving from *independence to DEPENDENCE* on the second mountain.

Those are hard words.

***Especially during this pandemic.***

Which has caused most of us to become isolated, and very focused on ourselves.

Some of that is *necessary* to keep healthy.

But some of it is a ***negative by-product*** of quarantine, and working from home,

and doing so much on screens—whether it's school, work, church or just binging TV shows and movies.

But here's the deal.

***We are STILL called to community,***

to share our lives and faith together,  
And be **dependent—upon God, and one another.**

Our **entire Bible shows the power of community,**  
Because it began as stories,  
passed around in communities!  
**Jesus was a story-teller,** telling stories to a community.

**The question is, can we embrace this way of life  
that Paul describes for us today?**

Can we see how it could bring us together?  
And help us climb a second mountain—  
Focused not on ourselves, but on others?

Listen again to his words--this way of life, that helps us to imitate God.

By the grace of God, we are called to:

*Speak the **truth**, because we are members of one another.*

*Get **angry but don't sin**, or hold grudges.*

***Work** honestly.*

***Don't speak evil**, only encouragement.*

***Don't grieve** the Holy Spirit.*

*Don't live in **bitterness or wrath or malice.***

*And be **kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving.***

This is what it means to

*Be **imitators** of God, as beloved **children.***

***To Live in love** as Christ loved us.*

**A life of love**—doesn't that sound **GOOD?**

And we all know that kind of life leads to joy.

And who doesn't need some **joy** right now? I know I do!

**So, how can we embrace this idea of coming together,  
Of living well, in community?**

What if we're at home due to pandemic?

I think these words **still apply.**

We are called to have commitments and connections,

**however we can** in this strange time,

And when possible, in person with other believers.

Electronic worship is awesome for those who cannot get to church, because of the virus or other issues—it's a life-saver.

But we are ***still called to be connected to the body of Christ.***

We need it to build up the body of Christ,  
so that we can be God's light in the world.

It's hard for us to know and follow what God is doing in the world  
when we are not connected.

***It's also hard for us to encourage each other***

in all these ways of life that Paul lists here.

How do we know when we are speaking to build up one another,  
or if we are being tenderhearted or forgiving, if we don't have connection?

Left alone, we have ***neither encouragement nor accountability.***

And as one member said to me this week,  
we also miss opportunities to work out differences,  
or agree to disagree.

The truth is, we are **not our own**, and we are not **on our own**.

***We are members of one another, just as Paul says.***

Think about that---we are THAT connected.

And as we make decisions on how to live,  
Those decisions affect our whole community!

We are ***ALL called to imitate*** God, in our personal lives,  
and our lives together.

This is the way to ***new life, and joy!***

Each of those things Paul encourages us to do and be—  
helps us live in a ***new way, imitating Christ,***

So, it might be helpful for us to think of how we imitate other people.

Who are your ***role models?***

What have they taught you?

We all have people in our lives,  
who we **hope to imitate**, don't we?

**Kids** are kind of naturally this way.  
imitating the adults all around them,  
Much to our **chagrin!**  
Ever had **your kids** doing the very thing  
you wish they wouldn't imitate?

We **all imitate people**,  
And we all have people **who imitate us**—  
Which is a sobering thought!

We imitate even doing the **most basic things** around the house,  
Like folding clothes, or loading the dishwasher,  
(ever notice how those things can cause fights—because apparently we  
learned different ways, right?)

Of course, imitating other people has **limitations**.  
Because people will fail us. We're not perfect.

**But imitating Jesus Christ**—now that's a different story.  
Paul urges us to put away the old self, and put on the new self,  
AKA the ways of Jesus.

It's not easy---which is why we **need each other**.  
We need connection.  
We need the body of Christ.

**We need to know, WE ARE NEVER ALONE.**  
**God** is always with us,  
And the **body of Christ** is always around us.  
Think about that.

You are not alone.  
**And your life is so much more than just YOU!**

We do make choices as individuals--  
We can choose what to do with our **anger**,

Our **words**,  
 What goes into our **hearts**,  
 And we have a choice **AS A CHURCH**, to do the same.

**And God does care about**  
**what we put into** our hearts, and minds, and bodies.  
 what we watch on T.V. or the internet,  
 what we read,  
 what we hear, and speak, and learn.

**And God cares about this as a family of faith—**  
 These are kind of like our standards.  
 This is how FPC Matawan lives.

When we live this way, it's an **witness to our community!**  
 And isn't it a reason for people to come and join us?  
 Don't we want to say—come see this **loving family** of faith,  
 come see where **really diverse people come together** to follow Jesus?

Remember Mister Rogers from children't television?  
 There's a neat book called  
**The Simple Faith of Mister Rogers** by Amy Hollingsworth.  
 Do you remember his calm and soothing voice, his compassion, grace,  
 And acceptance?  
 He really made a positive impact on many lives.  
 And his show was all about making **good choices**.

And there was a **hidden theology** behind his program, **Mister Rogers' Neighborhood**.  
 (he was an ordained Presbyterian Pastor)  
 It was based on the Good Samaritan, and the Great Commandment.

He **prayed each day** that the Holy Spirit  
 would help viewers to hear a Word from God.  
 He believed that everyone was created in the image of God.

That's why his characters in the **Neighborhood of Make Believe**  
 Dealt with real life issues,  
 and showed such **Forgiveness and grace**.

Although he was a television celebrity,  
he **rarely watched** television.

One day after seeing his grandson watch a ‘children’s show’ with guns and violence, and hearing his grandson justify it because the people being shot were ‘bad guys’, he decided to write a Public Service Announcement, and he sent it to local stations who would air it.

This is what he said:

*“Some television programs are **scary**, with people shooting and hitting each other. Well, you can do something about that. When you see scary television like that, you can **turn it off**. And when you do turn it off, that will show you that you are the **strongest** of them all. It takes **a very strong person to turn off scary TV**.”* See Amy Hollingsworth, *The Simple Faith of Mister Rogers*. (Nelson: Nashville, 2005), pg. 94.

Fred Rogers believed that we have a **choice** in what to do with our lives.  
And we can, with God’s help, **make good choices**.

See Amy Hollingsworth, *The Simple Faith of Mister Rogers*. (Nelson: Nashville, 2005), pg. 95.

The old slogan **WWJD** is overused, but it’s still a good one.  
What if we did stop to think about *What Would Jesus Do?*

But Christian life is not about just ‘**following the rules**’.  
It’s about a **relationship with Jesus**  
where Jesus is our **role model, our mentor**,  
the ONE we want to imitate.

Some say a set of rules would actually be easier.  
But is that how you imitate a friend or mentor?  
No—we **develop the relationship**, right?

We could make a list of all the things the Bible tells us to do.  
Or we could read the Bible, as we spend time **WITH Jesus**--  
deepening that relationship—which makes us **more and more like him**.

Remember the **Pharisees**?

The Jewish religious leaders of Jesus’ day,  
who lived by all 600+ Levitical laws?  
Jesus had a **real problem** with them,



Because they were all about the **rules**, and not about **love**.  
 He condemned them for looking good on the **outside**,  
 but not being good on the **inside**.

We need that **inner relationship**.  
 Just like Jesus himself –he **spent time with his heavenly Father**,  
 learning and growing in his faith.  
 Think of all the times  
 he withdrew from the crowds to be alone and pray.  
 What if we did the **same**?

The great thing is, we always have Jesus with us--  
 We have **his body** on earth, the church.  
 We have **his presence** in one another.  
 We have **his Holy Spirit** in our hearts.

We **CAN imitate Christ**.  
 If we are willing to **spend time with HIM**,  
 and with his body, the **church**.  
 That is our path, to new life, and JOY

Friends, hear the **Good News of the Gospel** today:  
 We are called to be imitators of God, in Jesus Christ.  
 And we are given the freedom and power to do that  
 through a **relationship** with Him.  
 May we put away our old self,  
 and put on the new life given to us by Jesus.  
 And to that, all God's people said,  
 Amen.