

Sermon Title: Imitators

Text: Psalm 99; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

By: Rev. Terry Carty

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Place: Kingston Springs United Methodist Church

Season: 18th Sunday after Pentecost; Proper 24; Ordinary 29

Main Point: We imitate behavior we respect. When we imitate people who are being sanctified, we become sanctified as well.

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I need to get some help from our younger members: who do you have posters or pictures of in your room? Justin Bieber, Zach Efron, Taylor Swift, athletes? What about other generations? Do you or have you had pictures of famous or beautiful people? Who has a picture of Bob Marley somewhere? The Beatles?

Idol worship is not unusual in our day - in our own culture. Often our idols are notable because of their skills - standout sports stars, popular musicians, actors/actresses, great innovators; other idols are notable because of their physical beauty or perhaps they have the 'cool' factor. But do not fool yourself, we idolize these people sometimes even to the level of worshipping them.



Paul's first letter to the Christian community in Thessalonica commends them for having turned to God from idols. He is probably addressing the Gentiles in the congregation more than the Jewish members. They turned their worship from the gods and idols of Macedonian culture and focused on the one, living God.

Before Paul's visit to Thessalonica, those Gentiles had idols that they probably knew had no real power, but they worshipped them anyway. The idols we worship today are like that - consciously we know they do not have the power to give us fulfillment, but we keep looking toward them as though they had power.



God works in interesting ways. Through history, God has used the fallen to do great things. God was using the redeemed Jews and Gentiles in Thessalonica to be witnesses to a living God in that region.

The Psalmist of the 99th Psalm recalls how God forgave and gave direction to the great people of the Hebrew faith: Jacob who coveted and stole his brother's birthright but became the very root of the families of Israel, Moses who murdered the Egyptian but lead the Israelites out of slavery, Samuel whose sons were corrupt but he appointed the first great king of Israel.

In every case, God forgave them and then gave them a task so great that they embraced their forgiveness to live for God. In the case of the Thessalonians, Paul reminds them that they have gained such reputation in their country because they gave up their idolatrous ways and became imitators of Paul, Silvanus, Timothy, and of the Lord.



Isn't that what we think God wants to happen in our town, in our lives? Don't we really believe that God forgives us so others can be reached and helped?

It just makes sense to me that the very life of Jesus is a calling to each one of us to follow his model. Not just the part of the model where he heals and helps, but the part of the model where he tells other people about the kingdom of God that exists even now in the midst of idolatrous living.

It worked for the disciples because they kept their eyes on Jesus and imitated him. It worked for Paul and Timothy because they kept their eyes on Jesus and imitated others who followed Jesus. It worked for the congregation at Thessalonica because they kept their eyes on Jesus and imitated Paul and Timothy.

Does it make sense that the same might hold true for us as we seek to turn our eyes away from useless idols and give our full worship to the one, living God? We turn our eyes on Jesus by reading those scriptures about his life and ministry on earth. We linger on every word that is recorded from his life on earth. We pray for revelation of God's mission for our lives. And we look to the saints, both living and beyond, who we can imitate in our efforts to become changed in thought, word, and deed.

As we go out of our sanctuary and into the world today, may we turn away from those glittery idols that beckon our attention, and may we seek to be imitators of those who imitate Christ.