

Living as a Life-Long Learner of Jesus

I Thessalonians 1:6-7

Life-long learning! I've heard that espoused often by people who are passionate about education. Life long! Always learning. And in my life experience, that seems to hold true. I think that COVID-19 has shown us all this, in relation to technology we've had to master. I'm thinking about learning things anew as I'm preparing with Sue to become grandparents for the first time. I know it's true that little ones learn so much so quickly. They see and hear and learn. They imitate adults. And so, I take very seriously my pending call to be Grandsky Nev.

One of the joyful family times I remember as a parent was for the 5 years I studied at Australian Lutheran College in Adelaide. We were blessed to be able to live in a small cottage on Sue's parents dairy farm. There were three generations of family, and it was a joy to see our children learn from their grandparents and from their uncles and aunts and cousins. Children imitate and learn especially from the loved ones who care for them.



Paul writes to the Christians at Thessalonica:

And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution, you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

The journey of faith, it seems, is one of life-long learning, life-long witnessing, life-long discipling.



Young families at St Paul's can tap into this. For example, FISH — which is an acronym of Faith integrating Sundays and the Home — has this very premise. Faith is caught as it's taught through learning from others and imitating their faith practices. Faith is taught by living it as an example for others. As we look forward to all being able to worship again together at Riversdale Road, we are looking at intergenerational aspects of our community as we start out. (So, for example, today we have three generations of family presenting our Scripture readings.)

For people of faith, the Scriptures are crystal clear. God calls us to keep growing in learning from him. And he gives us what we need to do this together across all generations... He gives us his Word, and people of all generations to be examples for us.

Our children learned love and faith so beautifully on a dairy farm where different generations of family rocked them in the faith. Do you have a special memory of growing up and learning love and faith in your life? Was someone else instrumental in showing you Jesus and forming you in your faith life? Take some time after the service to share this, say on the St Paul's FB page(<https://www.facebook.com/stpaulsboxhill/>), or come online on Sunday after worship, or simply share this in person in conversation, or by phone or message. Use those new tech skills and share with others.

Paul says this in Ephesians 5:1-2:

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Be imitators of God. And as imitators of God be examples, be the very face of God for other people who look to us.

In the Old Testament reading, Moses asks to see God's face. God says that's not possible. No one can see the face of God and live, because God is holy and Moses is a sinful human being. And sinful people cannot survive in the presence of holy God. So God instead protects Moses and hides him from seeing his glory, and so Moses just sees God's back.

You see, the face of God would only be revealed fully in the coming of his Son among and for people. God breaks down the barrier caused by sin in his Son who willingly goes to his death on a cross to redeem the lives of people under the sentence of death because of sin. God is revealed;



the face of God is revealed in love and in sacrifice for others on a cross. The power of almighty God is revealed unexpectedly in weakness and selfless sacrifice for others... for you and for me no less. Here in the face of death we meet the victory over sin... and in the face of the resurrected Christ, we meet the victory over death.

Our life-long learning as disciples of Jesus is always a call to seek his face and to reflect it in our living. When people see you and me, and when people see us as a community, who do they see by the way we live? Do they see a people of faith and hope in the promises? Do they see selfless, serving people who seek to share their faith, their forgiveness, their life? Do they see people who look beyond themselves to the interests of others in different generations? Do they

glimpse Jesus in our words, our listening, in the grace fruits of our lives? Who do people see in you?

I find myself as a 58-year-young Pastor so often learning, growing, and being encouraged in my faith by others of different generations. Recently I met with a dear Christian couple as one of them was about to enter hospital for major surgery. I was moved to say with all sincerity that they were great mentors for Sue and me. I said, "One day when I grow up, I'd like to be like you." Life-long learning. Life-long witnessing. I'm always growing up. Always learning the joy of faith in Jesus. And this is what we are all called to. A life-long learning journey of being a disciple of Jesus in a community of faith. For it is Christ himself who teaches us in the witness of others, as we see his face in the examples of others, and as others see the face of Christ in us. This is what Paul called the Thessalonians to a long time ago, and calls us to, today.

And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

So let's look COVID-19 in the face with Christ and his word of life. Despite the struggle, let's be who we are. Look anew to Jesus. Show him in your life. Make a difference. It happened for our family in a wonderful way on a dairy farm, as we saw the face of Christ in life together with others across the generations. And it calls me forward today to prepare to become a grandparent together with Sue.

This is the call to us today, to each of us individually, and to all of us together as God's church family. And we can do it. Together, we can do it.

I'm looking forward to learning and growing with you. It doesn't matter what age or generation we are. It doesn't matter what our background is, or our level of formal education, or what experience we bring. But the face of God in Jesus is where we are called together: to learn and imitate, to lead by example.

Life long... eternal life long. What a precious gift we have to share. Amen.

Video of the service including the above sermon: <https://youtu.be/1XKIKtsk2Ao>