

# To Be Like Jesus

Fourth Sunday After Pentecost  
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**O** Lord, make us have perpetual love and reverence for your holy Name, for you never fail to help and govern those whom you have set upon the sure foundation of your loving-kindness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*Romans 6:1b-11 (NRSV)*

Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup> By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. <sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup> We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. <sup>7</sup> For whoever has died is freed from sin. <sup>8</sup> But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. <sup>9</sup> We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. <sup>10</sup> The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. <sup>11</sup> So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

*Matthew 10:24-39 (NRSV)*

[Jesus said to the twelve disciples], “A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; <sup>25</sup> it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household! <sup>26</sup> “So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. <sup>27</sup> What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. <sup>28</sup> Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. <sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them

will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup> And even the hairs of your head are all counted. <sup>31</sup> So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. <sup>32</sup> “Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; <sup>33</sup> but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. <sup>34</sup> “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup> For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; <sup>36</sup> and one's foes will be members of one's own household. <sup>37</sup> Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; <sup>38</sup> and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup> Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

The title of my sermon is “Being Like Jesus.” In our gospel reading today Jesus tells us to be like himself: “**A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; <sup>25</sup> it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master.**” I’m sure we’d all like to be like Jesus. I think that’s common among Christians. I found a hymn from 1883 that expresses it like this:

1 I want to be like Jesus,  
So lowly and so meek;  
For no one marked an angry word  
That ever heard him speak.

Refrain:

I want to be like Jesus,  
God's well beloved Son;  
I want to be like Jesus,  
The pure and holy One.

2 I want to be like Jesus,  
So frequently in prayer;

Alone upon the mountain top,  
He met his Father there. [Refrain]

3 I want to be like Jesus,  
Engaged in doing good,  
So that of me it may be said,  
He hath done what he could. [Refrain]

4 Alas! I'm not like Jesus,  
As any one may see;  
Thy gentle Spirit, Savior, send,  
And make me like to thee.<sup>1</sup>

Who could argue with all the Christlike characteristics this hymn names? The problem—as the last verse says—is that we all find it hard to be like Jesus. But this verse also points out that it's God who makes us like Jesus, not our own efforts: **“Thy gentle Spirit, Savior, send,/And make me like to thee.”**

In our reading from the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans this morning, Paul teaches us about a very practical tool God uses to change us to be like Jesus. But first some background for the way our passage begins. Paul is arguing against a scandalous criticism against Christianity some opponents were making. They were saying that because Jesus forgives our sins through his death on the cross, we can sin freely without thinking twice about it. Paul uses the sacrament of baptism to make his argument: **“Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”** Paul is telling us that baptism is a

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<sup>1</sup> [https://hymnary.org/text/i\\_want\\_to\\_be\\_like\\_jesus\\_miller](https://hymnary.org/text/i_want_to_be_like_jesus_miller)

statement. It tells us and the world—all things visible and invisible—that we are united with Jesus in his death and in his resurrection.

There's a widespread understanding that baptism signifies a washing and a cleansing from sin. That's really only a preliminary, like John the Baptist's baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Our baptism into Christ means God is counting us dead with him and born again in the Holy Spirit because Jesus died and rose again. Paul says that because we have died to our old way of life, continuing to sin is unthinkable. Death is permanent. For us, the effects of Jesus' death are ongoing.

Paul says it this way: **“our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.”** Let's look at the first part of that sentence: **“our old self was crucified with him.”** I pointed out last week the embarrassing fact that we are all sinners. Our experience of our life trying to be like Jesus is that we are a work in progress. We make progress towards being more like Jesus by fits and starts—sometimes it seems like more fits than starts, doesn't it?

But when God looks at us he sees forgiven, reborn people—new creations. Our old self was crucified with Jesus on Good Friday outside Jerusalem 2, 100 years ago. It's worth noting that the only other appearances of the words **“crucified with him”** in the whole Bible are in references to the two criminals whose crosses stood alongside Jesus'<sup>2</sup>. When we declare our faith in Jesus through our baptism, we put ourselves between those criminals. They were crucified alongside Jesus. We were crucified in Jesus. His crucifixion was our crucifixion. His death was our death.

Paul's logic, then is that dead people can't sin. Death is permanent. The power of Jesus' death for us is ongoing. Our problem, of course, is that God considers our old self and its self-willed sinful impulses to be dead, but it's unfortunately very much alive. I often joke with parents at their children's baptism that they shouldn't expect baptism to improve the child's behavior. Everybody laughs because they're intimately acquainted with how their own attitudes, impulses, and behavior fall short of what God wants. We all know.

But the second part of that sentence is very important because it points out the reason for our co-crucifixion with Christ: **“our old self was crucified with him *so that* the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.”** Why is our death in Jesus' death necessary? Because as we all know from personal experience, the strongest opposition to God's ways encounter is from ourselves. We want to do

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 27:38, 44, Mark 15:32, John 19:32

God's will, but we often fail. As one friend once told me, "I want to be a living sacrifice, but I keep crawling off the altar."

We see ourselves as weak human beings who struggle to be a little better every day. But God sees us the way Michelangelo saw his completed sculptures. He said, **"The sculpture is already complete within the marble block, before I start my work. It is already there, I just have to chisel away the superfluous material."**<sup>3</sup> Our crucifixion with Christ is God's chisel to remake us into who he created us to be—to be like Jesus.

The objective fact is that Jesus was crucified to death with two other men outside of Jerusalem 2,100 years ago. It was on a Friday. And we were crucified in him. Our death is permanent. But the effects of Jesus' death for us are ongoing. Jesus' death is God's chisel. It's always available to us. As we apply it to our wayward attitudes, impulses, and behaviors, we chisel away the superfluous material of our old selves to reveal more and more of the new creation God has made us in Jesus. So meditate on Jesus' death, and your death with him. If this seems morbid, remember this: you can't have a resurrection without a death. Jesus' death is our death, and his resurrection is our resurrection. The same Spirit who raised him from the dead lives in us through our faith in Jesus. Ask the Holy Spirit to use Jesus' cross to chisel away at those parts of your life that are not like Jesus. We don't make ourselves to be like Jesus—God does. But we need to stay close to Christ in prayer, in studying his word, and in fellowship and service with one another. As we do, we'll become more and more like Jesus.

Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/1191114-the-sculpture-is-already-complete-within-the-marble-block-before>