

Imitating God?

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on August 8th, 2021 Ephesians 4:25 - 5:2 & John 6:35,41-51)

The elusive lyrebird, it can mimic any other bird in its area and even some human made sounds. Imitation they say is the sincerest form of flattery. When I think about imitations, I think, fake goods – fake jewellery, rip offs of fashion brands.

Imitating God, that is of a whole different order!

Unfortunately imitation to me has overtones of trickery, insincere flattery and cheap exploitation.

The writer to the church at Ephesus it seems has been celebrating all that they have done, learnt and become since accepting Jesus. Then there appears to be a bit of a list or does and don'ts, even a version of commandments. But is it? Or is it something more?

The list goes a bit like this – don't lie, don't be angry, don't steal and share what you have. However, a closer look suggests some slightly different ways of living. You see this is a way of living rather than a list of rules. Let's look again:

- Speak truthfully, as if you are speaking to your loved ones
- When you get angry, be careful how you respond, do something positive to deal with it before the sun goes down
- In your dealings with others and indeed with all you do, be honest, for example do an honest days' work
- Let the Holy Spirit do its work in you, don't block it
- Try not to be bitter (it will eat you up)
- Be kind
- Be tenderhearted
- Forgive

And in doing that you are acting like the beloved children of God, imitators of God, this is a way of living, living in love. This is the example Jesus gave us. This is who we are!

No trickery, flattering or cheap knock offs here.

But there is more. If we have a look at John's gospel we find some other things about God that we can imitate.

Believing in Jesus means people will not go hungry or thirsty and will experience life in all its fullness. And we don't have to do much at all, expect let ourselves be drawn by God into that relationship, drawn into that life. Just believe.

But imitating God, is that even possible?

I don't think this is easy, but maybe we need to think about how we try to do this. If we try to live up to a list of dos and don'ts we will always be aware of how we don't measure up.

Perhaps it might be better to concentrate on who we are and who God is. We are beloved children of God, drawn by God into a loving relationship with God. Rather than worrying about doing we should concentrate on allowing God to work in our lives,

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allowing God to care for us, allowing that knowledge to move from our heads to our hearts. Once in our hearts it will be easier to act.

Letting God's love into our hearts will enable us to imitate God. We will be able to deal with others honestly, to speak words to build up rather than cut down, to forgive, to deal with our anger and to live kindly – we will be able to do nothing else.

The church in Ephesus was not without its problems, as we are at the moment.

We find ourselves in and out of lockdown at the moment. Sometimes it feels like it is very difficult to imitate God.

Remember though, this God we are drawn to imitate, is revealed in Jesus who worked with those on the margins, got himself into trouble with the authorities all the time, upset the status quo and was arrested, faced an unjust trial, sentenced to death and killed in a most horrific way.

When I think about how we might be able to imitate God in our current circumstances I find myself drawn to the television for inspiration.

Like most I have been glued to Olympic games coverage. Sure, most feats feel superhuman. However there have been some moving situations of people acting in extraordinary ways, and I just don't mean their superhuman acts of endurance. I mean the way that when someone falls, another has picked them up.

The other thing on the television I have been drawn to is an advertisement. I don't really take much notice of advertisements, but one has really caught my eye. It's an ad for Google – a young woman is shopping using all her technology. She is not your typical 'model' used in advertisements – she has coloured frizzy hair and is a 'larger' woman. She has a list and finds herself in shops looking for items that have labels in other languages and shopkeepers who can't speak very good English. She goes about her shopping and gets it all and we follow her home, except she is not going home, she knocks on the door of an elderly Asian woman – turns out she has been doing the shopping for that woman and was keen to get exactly the correct ingredients. This ad of course is running off the back of what many did last year during our lockdown, using technology to help their neighbours.

So in our current lockdown let's be imitators of God. Let's show kindness, be tender hearted and forgive. Let's not blame groups for breaking the rules and causing the spread of Covid, instead find ways to make life easier for others – phone calls, notes, offers to get provisions for them. Let's live in love, and wait and see how God draws people to himself. Let's be who we are called to be – imitators of God. Amen.