

We all know lent is supposed to be a time for reflection and meditation on how we live our lives and just what Jesus himself gave for us. The sacrifices he made, the examples he gave. The way he showed us all how to live.

That is what Paul is saying to the Philippians here. He is not saying look at me! See how good I am!!! In his day, it was not considered bragging or being arrogant to give yourself as an example. As a matter of fact, I don't think it would be today either.

If someone has a track record of excellence and effectiveness, it is not seen as arrogant to say so. It was a no brag, just fact expectation in Paul's culture. One could be both aware of their advanced capabilities and humble as they described them. Paul sought to be a model of those who practice what they preach

He was a teacher, a leader who was expected to act and lead in a certain way. He was and is a role model for many Christians. And what a good leader he was. He had the background to show how not to live as well as the knowledge to show us how-to live-in Christ Jesus.

This is a good lesson for all of us especially during this Lenten season. Hmmm maybe that is why it is our lesson for today lol. Are we living our lives so that when others see us, they can say Here is where I have seen faith in her or him, where I have seen hope, and where I have seen love? Do we convey this in our everyday lives as Paul tried to do? We as Christians should hold ourselves up as examples of how to do this. At least we should try. You could be the difference for someone looking for the love of Christ in someone. Wouldn't it be great to be the person that shows Christ to someone who is lost and searching, searching for that something that they just can't put a name on. We can give them that something just by offering a hug, a smile, a glass of water, a shoulder to cry on...whatever it may be they need at that moment in

time when we have the opportunity to share God's love with them. To see them smile, to hold them when they cry, to hear them laugh with joy, all because you chose to be like Jesus to them. What more is there?

We live in a world where we are pulled apart by society every day and it just keeps getting uglier out there. I watched a clip on TV of a man walking down a street. He passes by a mother with her 2 children and just reaches out and for no reason whatsoever whacks the 4-year-old child in the back of the head and sends him sprawling. The really sad thing about this other than the fact of course that he did this is that it is not shocking anymore. The fact that he thought he could do that with no consequences, just hit him in the head and keep on walking. Mom, of course had other ideas, and she tackled him. But my point here is that this is the kind of world we are living in these days, and it is pretty darn scary. Someone should have taught that man about tough love a long time ago.

This is what we live with today though. These common occurrences are relentless and pervasive in our society. This campaign of anxiety-producing scenarios which focuses on threats, dangers, disasters, and risks, day in and day out. Seems there is a constant barrage of reasons NOT to love our fellow man, not to trust anyone, or if you are going to trust, who do you trust?

Then there is the social media focusing on possessions, wealth, convenience, and comfort, me me me, on the biggest boldest, newest, most advanced, most appealing things that money can buy.

I long for the days of my youth when I could go outdoors and spend the day without fear of anything. The days when God was still in our schools, people went to church on Sundays and religion was not a taboo.

Paul is simply telling us not to live as enemies of the cross of Christ. There are way too many of those people in the world. Whose destiny is destruction of all that we hold dear, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their minds are set on one thing and one thing only. Themselves.

Let us not fall into the snares our society has set for us. Let us remember our citizenship is in heaven!!

We need to constantly be discerning in order to distinguish ourselves from the enemies of the cross of Christ....to constantly be the ones following the cross to find life. To look for the good and to hold ourselves above the daily grind of stress and worry. To not let it wear us down so that we can respond as those who do live in Christ. We can be the ones that show what it is like to be Christian when the world is going to pieces around us. Follow my example he says. Stand firm in your faith so we can discern what matters most in our lives, what is really worth longing for from birth to death and beyond.

I love this passage from a favorite Dean Koontz book of mine. I know.... he writes scary weird books, but this passage is amazing to me, and the book is one of my favorites.

This momentous day is the name of the sermon in the book, and this is part of it.

Not one day in anyone's life is an uneventful day, no day without profound meaning, no matter how dull and boring it may seem, no matter whether you are a seamstress or a queen, a shoeshine boy or a movie star, a renowned philosopher or a Down's-syndrome child. Because in every day of your life, there are opportunities to perform little kindnesses for others, both by conscious will and unconscious example. Each smallest act of kindness-even just words of hope when

they are needed, the remembrance of a birthday, a compliment that engenders a smile—reverberates across great distances and spans of time, affecting lives unknown to the one whose generous spirit was the source of this good echo, because kindness passes on and grows each time it's passed, until a simple courtesy becomes an act of selfless courage years later and far away.

Likewise, each small meanness each thoughtless expression of hatred each envious and bitter act, regardless of how petty, can inspire others, and is therefore the seed that ultimately produces evil fruit, poisoning people whom you have never met and never will. All human lives are so profoundly and intricately entwined—those dead, those living, those generations yet to come—that the fate of all is the fate of each, and the hope of humanity rests in every heart and in every pair of hands. Therefore, after every failure, we are obliged to strive again for success, and when faced with the end of one thing, we must build something new and better out of the ashes, just as from pain and grief, we must weave hope, for each of us is a thread critical to the strength- to the very survival – of the human tapestry. Every hour in every life contains such often-unrecognized potential to affect the world that the great days for which we, in our dissatisfaction, so often yearn are already with us; all great days and thrilling possibilities are combined always in this momentous day.

Abram asked God What can you give me? And God answered. Fear not he tells Abram just as he tells us. Abram had just been through a lot He had just defeated 4 eastern kings and then he turns down the rewards offered by the King of Sodom after defeating his vast army with just a small band of men. God reassures him, calms him. I am your shield, your very great reward. He answers us all even when we don't hear or even listen. He promised Abram the world and I believe that promise is open to us all if we choose to embrace it.

Just as Paul gave those in his time a living example of how-to live-in Christ so God gives us each and every day through Jesus Christ himself. He is alive and well in each of us. Sometimes we have to take a deep breath and try to keep our mouths shut, or at least I do (I am struggling with that as I type!! I want to scream, can't you see I am busy, but I am not lol. I am trying very hard to practice what I preach) After all, we are all human aren't we. Let's just try to remember that what we say and how we act can have positive or adverse reactions years down the road!!

I am going to close with a prayer that a fellow parishioner here says every day and has allowed us to pray it also.

God, I offer myself to you-to build me and to do with me as you see fit. Release me from the bondage of self, so I can better do your will. Take away my difficulties, so victory over them may bear witness to those I would help with your power, your love, and your way of life. May I do your will always Amen.

PS She is still talking to me!!!!