

Mannequins

Well, we are in the midst of the Easter season. Spring has sprung, and everyone's thoughts obviously turn to turkey hunting. What do you mean "No"? I realize that not everyone shares my enthusiasm for hunting, but if you would indulge me, I'll offer some reflections on the Christian life from the turkey woods.

If you don't know how to recognize a turkey hunter, he would be the one leaving the house before sunrise, dressed in camouflage, heading to the woods to act like a turkey, hoping to entice a gobbler into gun range. He has several calling devices in his pockets, and a few years ago they added decoys to the arsenal. As if we needed more things to spend our money on.



A few years ago my nephew brought his young son along. It would be his job to carry the decoy. As they were going out the door he asked his dad if he had the mannequin (decoy). These turkey mannequins come in all sizes and materials. Some even move with the wind and look very life like. On more than one occasion I have been watching a big old gobbler cautiously move toward my decoy, when suddenly a hen turkey shows up, and that gobbler instantly turns and follows the real thing. Even the turkey knows there is a difference between life like and real life.

Paul says: "... **take hold of the life that is truly life.**" After Christ's resurrection the disciples receive the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, the indwelling presence of Christ as revealer of truth, counselor, and guide. For us the Holy Spirit is the difference between life like and true life.

As I reflect on my own life, I find it's been those who have taken hold of that life that is true life who are the ones who have influenced my life for the sake of Christ, and have helped me most in my faith journey. And these folks always seemed to have been characterized by passion for God and compassion for man. It is that witness of enlivened passion that draws us to follow the way of Christ. For years I lived among the mannequins of religion and church life, sometimes looking life like, but still recognizing there was more to the Christian life.

How is it, then, that we take hold of this true life? What enables us to become alive in Christ, to experience the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit?

I believe it begins by faith in what I might call the mannequin stage. Paul writes: "**Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loves us... .**" The Christian journey begins by faith in Christ. By faith we make a decision to accept Christ as the example of the virtuous life and conform our lives to that standard.

We begin by believing God's promises. People are created in God's image. Love never fails. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Love casts out fear. God is in control. All things work together for the good of those who love God. Sometimes these are hard to believe, but often the hardest things to believe are the things we need to believe most, and if we can

believe, by faith we are changed as we “ ***Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.***” (Romans 12:2)

But real transformation comes through surrender-- when enlightenment becomes enlivened. Only when we empty ourselves of worldly desires can we be filled with the Spirit of Christ. It seems it is not so much a taking hold of the life that is true life as it is allowing the power of true life to take hold of us.

The Christian purpose is making disciples. Disciples that not only imitate Christ but who love like him. Sometimes we don't feel the close presence of Christ in us, and we simply live like Christ till we can love like Christ. Mother Teresa once said, “Because we cannot see Christ we cannot express our love to him; but our neighbors we can see, and we can do for them what if we saw him we would do for

Christ... Our works are only an expression of our love for Christ.”

We are called to be the hands and feet of Christ to a hurting world, and often we find it is in the bandaging of other's wounds that we find our wounds are healed, bringing a deeper awareness of that part of Christ that lives in us.

Our worship themes through May focus on being Alive in Christ. Our web site, <http://www.buffaloruncharge.org/> , has a link to spiritual disciplines to help open us to the power of the Spirit. Our charge will be offering three new opportunities for spiritual formation: Becoming Alive in Christ; Battlefield of the Mind; and Perspectives.

We mature as Christians through cultivating our awareness of the Spirit of Christ within us, yielding our life like image to Christ's living presence until we can say as Paul said:

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

If we hope to influence the lives of those around us to follow Christ we will need more than the mannequins of religion and church that look like who Christ was. It will require the love of the living Christ working through us.

Blessings,

Pastor Duane