

“Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Hal Blaine died this past week.

I'm sure that doesn't mean a great deal to most of you. My guess is that only a few know who he was—and only because of news reports they may have heard. Yet I feel I can say with confidence that you are familiar with his work. Blaine was a studio musician; a drummer whose signature sound can be heard on songs you know—after all, he was the drummer for more than 6,000 recorded songs, many of which were Grammy winners and chart toppers. His drumming supported Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin, and groups like the Byrds and the Beach Boys. He played with Herb Albert and the Tijuana Brass, when they won a Grammy for *A Taste of Honey*; with Frank Sinatra on *Strangers in the Night*; with Simon & Garfunkel on *Bridge over Troubled Water*. He was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2000, and dubbed the “most recorded drummer in history.” To Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys he was simply, “the greatest drummer ever.”

Any number of young drummers, if they are familiar with the greats in music, would want to be like Hal Blaine. Maybe Pastor Eric, when he is playing, is thinking he would like to be like Hal Blaine. After all, we all need role models. Young hockey players dream of being like Wayne Gretsky or Sidney Crosby, or some other hockey great. Celebrities, sports stars, favourite teachers, or free-spirited personalities—they may be the people we look up to and want to be like. Sometimes those models are heroes or successes, but we also know that there are negative role models, and perhaps the worst of example is in copy-cat killers. There is a saying that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. In both the good and the bad; sometimes in beneficial and in some hurtful ways, we follow the example of those whom we see as role models in our lives.

Do you have a role model? How has that model guided your life and your decisions? In our text today, Paul says: *Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us*. Paul isn't afraid of holding himself up as an example or role model for people. He urged the Thessalonians, the Corinthians, and the Galatians to be imitators of him. Of course, Paul doesn't just think we should be like him; rather, as he tells the Corinthians, *“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”* (1 Corinthians 11:1, ESV) Christ is our ultimate role model. As one of the hymn writers has said, *“I want to walk as a child of the light. I want to follow Jesus.”* (LSB 411, st. 1) Our walk with Christ does change the way that we live. It changes all that we do. It keeps us from those things harmful to our soul's salvation, and lead us in the glorious life that our Saviour has prepared for us in His grace.

In our day and age, I imagine many people would think that they don't want or need role models. After all, individuality and self-expression are stressed over and over. Everyone thinks they are their own person. No one can tell them what to do or what to be. That is the big mantra of our day and age—be yourself. Don't be an imitator. No one should tell you how to live your life. If you want to march to the beat of a different drummer, just be sure that it is the beat that you want. It's all about you, after all. But you know who started that trend, don't you? It was the devil himself. Oh, he loves to get us thinking that everything is about us. He wants us to fixate on our wants and desires. That's what he did with Adam and Eve. Hey, don't let God keep you from anything you want. If you want that fruit, go ahead and eat it. Be the master of your destiny! Sadly, Adam and Eve didn't realize that they, who had walked with God, were now listening to and learning from the devil. They were imitating him, not the God who had blessed them so richly.

The devil continues to deceive so many with that same lie. As Paul says: *For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things*. Jeremiah is told he deserves to die, simply because he told the people

what they didn't want to hear. They were living for themselves, and they weren't going to let this prophet tell them what they should or should not do. In our Gospel lesson, Jesus weeps over Jerusalem: ***“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”*** (Luke 13:34, ESV) Why weren't the people willing to come to God? It is because they wanted to do things their own way—but again, to be more accurate, they wanted to do things the devil's way.

It is said, “when in Rome, do as the Romans”. Sadly, the Rome of Paul's day was a very corrupt and evil place. It was filled with so many of the same things that we see today—sexual deviation, gluttony, greed, power hungry individuals and self-serving people. It was a nation obsessed with its own lusts and desires. While Paul isn't writing here to the Romans, he does point to them, and those who are like them, as a bad example. He says that ***they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.*** This sort of lifestyle shows that they are enemies of Christ. They despise the cross, because the cross points to the evil of sin and the holiness of God. Paul doesn't pull any punches, either. He makes it clear that those who have been following the wrong role model, even if they think it's all about them, end up in destruction. They end up with the sad torment and eternal death of hell.

In contrast to all this, Paul calls us to be imitators of him, as he is an imitator of Christ. He reminds us that we are not Romans, and we are not to do as those Romans did. Rather, we are citizens of heaven, bought with a price; redeemed as God's people through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He holds the cross before our eyes, and reminds us that this is where life—true life—is to be found. He assures us of the wonderful future that is ours in Christ, ***who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.*** This new life isn't just something in the future. This is our life now, as we live by faith in Christ. We are citizens of heaven and are to live up to our citizenship.

Citizens of heaven know that they need a role model. Paul says: ***join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.*** “Look to the faithful in Christ”, Paul says. “Keep your eye on them, and follow their example”. Paul says we are to walk according to that example. The word walk here means to tread around, and has the sense of living in a certain way. Paul uses another word translated as “walk” that has the same meaning of being in line with, or keeping in step with something; in this case, with the example of the faithful. Paul never suggests that we won't stumble. He does say, however, that we can, with the help and strength of the Holy Spirit, be the people Christ has redeemed us to be.

So who's your role model? Paul is a good example for us. Faithful believers are good examples for us. The best example, of course, is Christ. Paul will remind the Philippians of the humble service of Christ, and urge them: ***“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,”*** (Philippians 2:5-6, ESV) Instead of thinking it's all about us, we need to remember it was not about us, but for us. It's all about what Jesus has done *for us*. He set aside the glory and majesty of heaven to live for us. He gave His life for us. He died and rose for us. He did all this to free us from ourselves, from the world and from those things that may seem so important today, but mean nothing in the grand scheme of eternity. The truth is, even those who think there is no eternity will find out one day, to their shame and sorrow, that they have followed the wrong role models. Thankfully, we stand firm, confident and hopeful in the Lord. We have the example of our dear Saviour and King. More importantly, we have the life that flows from Him. That glorious citizenship we have in heaven, given to us in our Baptism and fed through the Word of Christ continues to guide us. Yes, that heavenly citizenship makes us different from the world, but it is also the assurance of the life we will have with our Lord in the glory of His kingdom. Lord, grant that we may follow your example, and live as the people You have redeemed us to be; and grant that by our example, others may see you and the life you give! Amen.