

Sermon: Do you have a doppelganger? Psalm 122 Philippians 3: 17- 4:1

In my reading this week, I came across an item referring to a Facebook feature about “Doppelganger Week”. This piqued my interest because of a recent experience I had at a grocery store. So, what is a doppelganger? Doppelganger has historic roots, but over time it has come to refer to any double or look-alike of a person. So, the idea of Doppelganger Week on Facebook was to switch your Facebook profile picture to whatever celebrity you think you resemble most. It’s like looking in your bathroom mirror and seeing Audrey Hepburn or Elvis Presley looking back at you. Doppelganger is a German word that literally translates to “double walker” or “double goer”. A doppelganger is someone who resembles you in scary detail. Someone who encounters your doppelganger will swear it was you, even though you can prove you were not in the location your double was sighted.

So, a couple of weeks ago, I stopped into a grocery store in Walkerton to pick up some limburger cheese. Just down the aisle by the milk, I saw my sister-in-law Sandra, who lives in Wetaskiwin, Alberta. What was she doing in Walkerton, Ontario, I wondered. Just as ‘Sandra’ turned toward me, I could see it was not her, but someone who could have been her twin. Among other things, I wondered, is there someone out there who looks like me? If I wanted to look like someone, who would it be?

In this morning’s reading, the apostle Paul sees the Philippian Church as a healthy church and hopes to see it remain that way. The apostle encouraged them to continue to live for Christ by Christ’s example of humility. And, with Christ as the example, Paul further urged believers to live as Christ-lights in the world. He stressed that being right with God did not come from any personal merit, but solely through the righteousness of Christ; to mirror or imitate Christ, if you will.

Further in my readings this past week, I came across another term, and I must admit that this one was not familiar to me. How many of you have heard the term “beatific vision” (pronounced ‘be a tific’)? Beatific vision is that moment when a Christian person dies and passes into glory beholding Jesus face-to-face. We’ve heard of people, who at that moment of passing, see a bright light; perhaps the radiant face of Jesus. According to the Old Testament, prophets saw God dimly, as if through many panes of glass, except for Moses, who saw God clearly, as if through just one pane of glass. Jesus teaches that the pure of heart will see God and Scripture reminds us that “for now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we shall see face to face”. In reading Paul this morning, I think he is really talking about the beatific vision of seeing Jesus’ face in the sense that he wants the Philippian church; and us by extension; to continue toward the goal of seeing Christ in glory. He wants us to continue pursuing the Christian life as a journey, a race, toward the time when we will behold the glory of the Lord and enjoy perfect and sinless communion with Him.

This is where we see the role of imitation in journeying toward the goal. The apostle says, “Join together in following my example, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. Our citizenship is in heaven”. Paul’s words are encouragement as he and his friends travel ‘two by two’ from church to church; from town to town; striving to emulate a Christ-like life. Keep in mind that the early church did not have Google, or email, or Facebook, or Zoom, or even snail mail for that matter. They had people like Paul and Timothy as examples. Before the New Testament was written, they only had access to

the Law and the Prophets, Scriptures read in the temple, and the oral tradition of Jesus and the lives of His disciples. We now have the completed inspired Word of God, including both testaments, and we are blessed with multiple versions to read about what God requires of his people.

Imitation is still a powerful example and help for us. I think most of us here have observed a young growing child. We watch as they learn to crawl and ultimately walk, albeit with the help of an ottoman and table for support. My mother told me that I crawled backwards. My defense is that it was easier to come down stairs that way. My point is this. As one child is learning to walk, have you noticed what another young growing child is doing? They're watching. They're watching the other child stand upright and put one foot in front of another, and as they do, you can see their own little feet begin to move. They are trying to imitate what the other child is doing. This is one of the benefits of daycare. Kids come home with a whole new set of skills. The lesson is not lost on us. Paul is saying to find more mature brothers and sisters in Christ to imitate; to spend time with those who can help us on our journey in ultimately seeing Jesus face-to-face.

There is something else we can look forward to. Jesus has all power. And when He returns, He will transform us into glorified bodies. Think about the Transfiguration of Christ we heard about a couple of weeks ago. Jesus has hiked up the side of a mountain with three of His disciples. When they get to the top of the mountain, Moses and Elijah show up. Peter, James, and John witness Jesus' face and clothes suddenly become radiant with light. The scriptures are not overflowing with detail. All it says is that they were to listen to Jesus, descend down the mountain, and not say anything about what just happened. I don't know about you, but I would want to tell someone about this life changing event. And what happened to the other two? Moses was only 120 years old and in the prime of his life when God called him home, and was Elijah's chariot of fire parked off to the side somewhere? Scripture doesn't say.

When Jesus comes again, he will transform *our* bodies into glorified bodies. When we pass away, our spirits return to heaven. Now, just hearing myself say those words gives me a little more understanding. In talking about death, we use words like 'pass away'. It doesn't sound like the end. This sounds like something straight from Moses, Elijah, and Enoch. They didn't just die as such; they passed into God's heavenly realm. I added Enoch to the mix here because he bookends the Bible. Do you remember Enoch? We first encounter him in the Book of Genesis. He was Adam's great-great-great-great grandson, and Noah's great-grandfather. Enoch lived a holy and faithful life to the Lord and became the father of Methuselah, the longest-living person; just 969 years young. How does that make you feel this morning? For you genealogists here, Enoch is the seventh generation from the first person created by God. In the Book of Genesis, it says that Enoch "walked with God: and he was no more; for God took him", which is interpreted as Enoch entering heaven while yet alive. Now, fast forward to the end of the Bible; the Book of Revelation; where Enoch appears once again representing one of the two witnesses of the witnessing church because Jesus sent His disciples out 'two by two'. So, Enoch bookends the Bible; having not died but passing into God's heavenly realm. Even Solomon reassures us in the Book of Ecclesiastes, "Then the dust shall return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it". It is in this moment of passing away we will see Jesus face-to-face.

And then we will wait for the completion of all things, when Jesus returns a second time, ushering in the new heaven and the new earth. It is at that time that we shall receive the glorified bodies that await us in glory.

Paul's final encouragement is for us to seize the Lord, pursuing the Lord with purpose and passion. Jesus teaches that the pure of heart will see God and Scripture remind us that "for now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we shall see face to face"; a beatific vision indeed. At the outset, I mentioned that we all have a doppelganger somewhere in the world. And now that I think more about it, I think our mysterious double looks back at us every time we look in the mirror. His name is Jesus.

To God be the glory. Amen.