

FRAGRANT GIFTS OF GOD EPH 5:1-2, 8-10, PHLP 4:15-20
SEVENTEENTH SUN. AFTER PENTECOST OCT 5, 2014

Ephesians 5:1-2, 8-10

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ...⁸ for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

Philippians 4:15-20

¹⁵ And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. ¹⁶ Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. ¹⁸ I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Theme today is International LWML theme for this year
so topic is why LWML women smell nice & rest of us too.
Even though God doesn't have body, we may be used to
speaking of God's powerful arm, all seeing eyes,
listening ears, giving hand, the words of his mouth.
But today we will think about God's discerning nose.
He can smell sincerity a mile off.
So we can smell nice to God and others,
but what makes us smell nice is not perfume but Christ.

CHRIST'S SACRIFICE HAS A FRAGRANCE OF LOVE
OUR GIFTS CAN SHARE THE FRAGRANCE OF CHRIST
GOOD FRUITS SPREAD THE FRAGRANCE OF CHRIST

CHRIST'S SACRIFICE HAS A FRAGRANCE OF LOVE

Theme verse for LWML this year is:

Eph. 5:² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

There are some good smells this time of year,
apple pie, fireplace, outdoors: autumn leaves, steak on grill,
and if the wind is right: Angies Kettle Corn
What makes a smell good? Not just the smell itself,
but memories and experiences we associate with it.
Text refers to what smells good to God: sacrifices
Gen 8 tells of Noah's sacrifice after he got off the ark.
"And when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in
his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man,
God being pleased with the smell is a way of saying
God accepts the sacrifice and grants his blessing.
But God is not pleased just because he likes the smell
of steaks grilling on the altar.
The prophets tell of sacrifices God does not accept.
He considers the smoke just stench in his nostrils,
because the people were just going through the motions,
their behavior was stinky.
What matters most to God is not the amount of the sacrifice
but the attitude that goes with it.
If we proudly think our good works deserve God's blessing,
it is like burning a big pile of garbage.
When sacrifices smell good to God
it is because of what is associated with them:
Obedience to his instructions, gratitude for his gifts,
trust in him alone for grace and blessings.
This is why sacrifice that is most acceptable & fragrant to him,
is the sacrifice of Christ himself on the cross.
Because, as Paul says, it was a willing gift of himself,
it was given out of great love for us and for God.
It was his sweet attitude that made the sacrifice fragrant.
We can be confident this sacrifice is accepted by God
and that he grants his blessings in return - to us.
When Jesus died, women who were prototype of LWML women
serving funerals, followed custom of using spices
that smelled good to cover the stench of decaying body.
But it is actually Jesus' death that is the fragrance
that covers the stench of our spiritual decay & rottenness.
This is what makes LWLM women and us smell wonderful,
the fragrance of Jesus' sacrifice in our place.
In recent weeks, we have been reading through Philippians.
Here too, Paul refers to fragrant sacrifice, also showing...

OUR GIFTS CAN SHARE THE FRAGRANCE OF CHRIST

Phlp. 4:¹⁸ I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

You know when you are around a smell like smoke, fish
or heavy perfume, you tend to take on that smell,
it gets in your hair & clothes.
So even other people can tell where you have been.
When we are close to Christ, washed in his sacrificial blood,
we smell to God like his son, maybe like a new baby smell.
Or we are like Jacob who dressed in brother Esau's clothes
when he brought food to father Isaac to ask for his blessing.
His father grabbed him & smelled the outdoors
and gave him Esau's blessing.
But we are dressed in robes of Christ's righteousness
not just as a trick but so we can do his work in his overalls.
We have sacrificing to do as God's vineyard workers.
Unlike Jacob, what God can smell a mile off is attitude.
What is acceptable, fragrant & pleasing to God
about Philippian's gifts for Paul's work
is that they have taken on the attitude of Christ.
In Paul's words to Ephesians, they were imitators of God,
acting like God, not because they were just pretending,
but because they were beloved children
who naturally took on their Father's mannerisms.
So, like Jesus, their gifts were not grudging but joyful,
not given because they were asked and felt obligated
but because they planned & wanted to on their own.
Their gifts were given out of love for God, for Paul
and for those who were hearing Gospel from Paul.
Like widow's mite, pattern for gifts WLML is known for,
their gifts were generous, not in size
but in comparison to their own neediness.
This is because their gifts were given out of faith and trust
that God would supply every need of theirs
according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

This phrase can mean God supplies us from his riches
or in abundant proportion to his riches in glory
or because of his riches in glory in Christ
or that the riches he supplies are those in glory
or actually, all of the above.

All, of which serves to glorify God, which is our goal.

GOOD FRUITS SPREAD THE FRAGRANCE OF CHRIST

Eph. 5:⁸ for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true),

Phlp. 4: ¹⁵ And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. ¹⁶ Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.

Beside “fragrant sacrifice”, another word picture

found in both Eph. 5 and Phlp. 4 is fruits,

which is fitting because fruits are often fragrant.

and also because when Paul writes about fruits of the Spirit, as in Galatians, he is talking about attitudes:

love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, etc.

The point is first that these attitudes just naturally grow

from having God’s word planted & growing in our hearts.

or as Paul puts it in Eph. 5, from being in God’s light.

but fruits also have seeds in them that produce more.

as Paul writes in Phlp 4, it increases.

Paul uses business language, picturing their gift as investment for which he is here writing a receipt.

First their giving is good for them as it is for us, it is part of a healthy, growing, Christian life.

But also, it is good for others, not just Paul.

They have joined with him in partnership.

The business of God, in which we are all involved

not just as customers or servants but as partners

is spreading the wonderful fragrance of God to others.

Paul writes about this in 2 Cor. 15:

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. ¹⁵ For we are the aroma of Christ to God

among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, ¹⁶ to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.

LWML is Lutheran Women's MISSIONARY League

because they, & rest of us are like clerk at perfume counter.
promoting the fragrance we are wearing.

I don't know, but maybe smells are like tastes,
what one things is great another may think is awful.
What Christian living is about is going around
smelling like Jesus Christ, crucified and risen again.

Some may sniff and smell only the death:

Sacrifice? Dying to selfishness and self glory?
That smells as good as a trailer full of rotting chickens.
But others by God's grace get a whiff of the grace of God
who raised Christ from the dead and us with him.
And so, in faith, the breathe deep the Gospel
and follow their nose to the sacraments.

This is the partnership in which we invest our gifts & our work
so that our good fruits smell like Christ to others.

Just as our good fruits make God think of Christ.

He is pleased not just with our imperfect attitudes & behavior
but he is pleased with us because of Christ
and what he has done to make us fragrant.

CHRIST'S SACRIFICE HAS A FRAGRANCE OF LOVE

It is a sacrifice made with the right attitude
so it is accepted by God and he responds with a blessing

OUR GIFTS CAN SHARE THE FRAGRANCE OF CHRIST

When Christ pours out his grace on us,
we too have the accepted fragrance of Christ to God
as he blesses us with gifts to share with attitudes of
joy, generosity and trust in God

GOOD FRUITS SPREAD THE FRAGRANCE OF CHRIST

As the seed of God's word grows his fruits in us
our fruits have the fragrance of Christ to others.
as we join in partnership to use all we have to serve God

This is how & why, like LWML women,
God makes us smell nice