



**VILLAGE
CHURCH**

Presbyterian (USA)

Smelling Faith

SCRIPTURE:
Ephesians 4:25-5:2

August 21, 2022 – Sermon by Rev. Dr. Rodger Nishioka

The church in Ephesus is struggling just like many of these new Christian communities in the first century. Ephesus, in the first century, was estimated to have a population more than 300,000—the largest city second only to Rome in all of the Roman empire. It had a huge Mediterranean port and was on the major east-west trade route. It claimed one of the seven wonders of the world: The Temple of Artemis (or Diana). Pilgrims would make their way to Ephesus to worship at the temple to the goddess. This temple sat at the top of a hill overlooking the port and a large road went directly from the port to the temple. Along both sides of the street were shops selling souvenirs, t-shirts, statues and incense. There were so many incense shops that Ephesus was said to have the smell of incense. People would say, “You smell like an Ephesian.”

The writer to the church tells them how they are to behave with one another. Put away falsehood. Stop lying. Speak the truth to another because we belong to one another. Be angry but do not sin. Don’t let the sun go down on your anger. Do not make room for the devil. It is not so much that the devil controls you as you allow the devil to control you. Thieves need to stop stealing. One Bible scholar wonders if there was a group of thieves who had joined the new church and they would go out and steal and give to the church. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths but speak only that which builds up the body. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God. Eugene Peterson says, “Do not break God’s heart.” Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Be imitators of God as God’s beloved children and be like Christ

Jesus who gave himself up as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Remember, there were so many incense shops on the road to the Temple of Diana that Ephesus was said to have a smell. No wonder the writer says be like Jesus who offered himself as a fragrant offering. Smelling faith.

Neuroscience has much to tell us about our sense of smell, our olfactory. They tell us that our olfactory is the most powerful sense for triggering memory and emotion because it runs straight through our limbic system, our amygdala, where emotion happens in our brain and hippocampus, where memory is lodged. None of the other classic senses do this.

No surprise that in a consumer society, businesses take advantage of this. It’s called ‘scent marketing.’ In an article in the Journal of Marketing, researchers found that stores that provide a pleasant smell in their store, usually a light fragrance of citrus—either orange or lemon—experience a 7-12% increase in sales over stores that do not. A number of stores do what is called ‘brand scent marketing.’ Cinnabon places their ovens near the front of their stores in malls so you will smell their cinnamon rolls when walking by. Starbucks delayed the introduction of their hot breakfast sandwiches for more than a year until they could develop ovens that would not allow the smell of the sandwiches to escape because they only want you to smell one thing when you walk into a Starbucks anywhere in the world. They want you to smell coffee. And it is the same coffee smell whether you are in a Starbucks here in Prairie Village or in Berlin or Tokyo or Capetown, South Africa. The sense of smell is powerful—for good and for ill.

You know I used to teach at Columbia Seminary in Decatur, Georgia. Near our campus is St. Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church. In one of the classes I taught, I would take students there for the experience of their ancient liturgy. The Orthodox love their incense. They observe communion, called the eucharist, every service. And there are these marvelous icons everywhere you look.

I found out later from the priest, Father John, that some of my students would return and worship there from time to time. This was curious to Father John. One time he asked me, "Professor Nishioka, why do you think this is?" "I think, Father," I said to him, "It is because when they come to worship with you, they gain a powerful experience of faith through sight and sound and taste and smell and touch. One of my students told me that they loved how the smell of incense stayed with them the whole day and even the next day. When they got in their car, they still smelled it and they knew that had been in worship." Smelling faith.

It was a couple of years ago that I received a text from Dana. She asked that I call her. I had walked with her through her mother's battle with cancer and death. Her mother died far too young. She and her mom were best friends. It had been just over a year since her mom died and Dana

missed her every day. On that day, she had felt particularly sad because her two young children were growing up so fast and she so wanted to talk with her mom about all that was going on. So she took some time and was walking in her neighborhood on a route that she and her mom walked countless times. Dana said she just missed her so much and began to cry. Then she said she stopped because she smelled her mom's perfume. It was the same perfume she bought her every Mother's Day. She told me it was so real. And she looked around and there was no one anywhere near her. "Rodger," she said, "Do you think it's possible that my mom sent that to me?" "Absolutely," I said. "It is a wonder and a mystery to me, but Dana, absolutely. And there will come a time when you will see her face to face again and you might say to her, 'Hey, Mom, you know there was this one day when I could swear I smelled your perfume...' and she will smile at you and say, 'Yes, sweetheart. That was me. I just wanted you to know I was with you.'" Smelling faith.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Tasting faith. Seeing faith. Smelling faith.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.