

Christ-Like Flowers (Followers)

St. Luke's Chapel

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Matthew 6:28-30, 32b-33 (ERV, see also Luke 12:27-28)

Jesus says: "And why do you worry about clothes? Look at the flowers in the field. See how they grow. They don't work or make clothes for themselves. But I tell you that even Solomon, the great and rich king, was not dressed as beautifully as one of these flowers. If God makes what grows in the field so beautiful, what do you think he will do for you? It's just grass—one day it's alive, and the next day someone throws it into a fire. But God cares enough to make it beautiful. Surely he will do much more for you. Your faith is so small! [...] Don't worry, because your Father in heaven knows [...] what you need. What you should want most is God's kingdom and doing what he wants you to do. Then he will give you all [...] you need."

Psalms 103:1-5a, 6, 8-19, 22 (ERV)

My soul, praise the Lord!

Every part of me, praise his holy name!

My soul, praise the Lord

and never forget how kind he is!

He forgives all our sins

and heals all our sicknesses.

He saves us from the grave,

and he gives us love and compassion.

He gives us plenty of good things.

The Lord does what is fair.

He brings justice to all who have been hurt by others.

The Lord is kind and merciful.

He is patient and full of love.

He does not always criticize.

He does not stay angry with us forever.

We sinned against him,

but he didn't give us the punishment we deserved.

His love for his followers is

as high above us as heaven is above the earth.

And he has taken our sins

as far away from us as the east is from the west.

The Lord is as kind to his followers

as a father is to his children.

He knows all about us.

He knows we are made from dust.

*He knows our lives are short, that they are like grass.
He knows we are like a little wildflower that grows so quickly,
but when the hot wind blows, it dies.
Soon, you cannot even see where the flower was.
But the Lord has always loved his followers,
and he will continue to love them forever and ever!
He will be good to all their descendants,
to those who are faithful to his agreement
and who remember to obey his commands.
The Lord set his throne up in heaven,
and he rules over everything.
Everything the Lord has made should praise him
throughout the world that he rules!
My soul, praise the Lord!*

Dear congregation!

In God's Word, as in Psalm 103:15-16, we can hear or read that *"our lives are short, that they are like grass. We are like a flower that grows so quickly, but when the hot wind blows, it dies. Soon, you cannot even see where the flower was."* Likewise, in Isaiah 40:6-8 (1 Peter 1:24) we are told that *"people are like grass. Any glory we [they] enjoy is like a flower. When a wind from the Lord blows on us [them], the grass dies and the flower falls. Yes, we [they] are like grass. Grass dies and flowers fall, but the word of our God lasts forever."*

Jesus says in his Sermon on the Mount, as we hear or read in Matthew 6:28-30, 32b-33 (Luke 12:27-28), *"Look at the flowers in the field. See how they grow"*. As the people were gathered with Christ in the field, perhaps they even had a look around to spot some of the flowers nearby. Anyway, Jesus encouraged them and us today to really look at the flowers. He meant for us to see how flowers grow, and learn from them. The Aramaic word that Jesus used for *"looking at"* was translated into Greek with καταμάθετε ('katamathete'), which means to 'observe' or to 'consider'.

These words of our Lord and Saviour – *"Look at the flowers in the field. See how they grow"* – they spoke to me over the past month, when I went out into nature at various occasions to collect flowers for a herbarium. A herbarium is a collection of flowers. I went outdoors to look for flowers quite many times, on my way back home from work, or in my free time. Sometimes I took Samuel along, for four eyes can spot more than two eyes, and I wanted to bring him closer in touch with nature, God's creation.

We collected flowers not by plucking and pressing them but by taking pictures with our mobile phones. At home we then studied the flowers that we had collected in by means of botanical books, web resources or an application termed NatureGate (www.luontoportti.com). Our purpose was to identify the flowers we had collected. Quite often we marvelled at their outfit or their dress with its colours and shapes. Today, at the end of this sermon, you will be able to view a [slideshow](https://www.icloud.com/sharedalbum/#B0N532ODWBwOoF) (<https://www.icloud.com/sharedalbum/#B0N532ODWBwOoF>) of the flowers that we have been able to collect thus far. For Samuel collecting flowers was and is also part of his school work. His task is to create a herbarium with flowers. And for me collecting flowers is mostly to learn something new apart from the things that I usually do and learn at my daily work.

But when Jesus told people and his disciples *“to look at the flowers and see how they grow”*, he meant it as a lesson for life. We can turn it into a lesson for our lives, too, as we are all like flowers according to the Bible, like we heard or read a short while ago.

So, what does Jesus want to tell us, to you and me? Why should we look at flowers and how they grow? What do we see when we observe the flowers and consider their growth? Let’s have a closer look! Let me list and show you altogether seven points that I find meaningful regarding Jesus’ words:

1. First of all, I think that Jesus wants to tell us that we are created by God, just like flowers. Originally, we are beautifully made by our Creator. Each and everyone of us is created in God’s image and dressed according to his standard of natural beauty. God spoke and breathed life into us. He clothed us with a naturally beautiful dress alike flowers. We all are of different colour and shape, but we are equally made to live our lives and grow and flourish and bear fruit in this world. And one day, of course, God will let the hot wind blow, and make us wither and die. Just like flowers.
2. Second, Jesus says that we should not worry about clothing or anything else in our lives. God takes care of us. He clothes even the flowers in a natural dress and provides for them, so he clothes us and provides clothing all through our lives as believers in Jesus. Furthermore, God provides all necessities required for our growth and flourishing and bearing fruit here on this earth. To speak in botanic language bearing in mind the life of flowers and us as human beings in general, and Christians in particular: God provides the good soil, the air, the rain and the sun. He provides all that we need in this life, He makes provision of everything required and necessary for our earthly lives.

3. Third, Jesus asks us to have faith in him alone and grow in our lives not by earthly but by heavenly things. Just as flowers gain nutrition from good soil into which they have been planted by God and just as flowers are nurtured with rain and sun from above, we should – figuratively speaking – be well rooted in God’s word and look up to him and receive blessings from him, our Father in Heaven. This means also to share and pass on God’s blessings to other people and to take care of God’s creation here on earth, as we will see a little bit further down the list.
4. Fourth, Jesus wants us to understand that we are fallen creatures that once got exposed in nakedness because of our own fault and shortcomings. Since then our self-made outfit is merely covering our nakedness, even though we are originally created in God’s image and want to design and make our garments according to his standard of natural beauty. So, to be true, after all I think that we are essentially naked in God’s sight. Our original and naturally beautiful dress was spoiled due to our fall, and the glory that we enjoy on this earth does not last eternally, just like the glory of flowers. Our glory only lasts for a little while, for the span of a human life, even when we become Christians and live our lives accordingly. Like Solomon, whose outfit and wealth and wisdom was truly God-given and who was glorifying God for most of his life, but yet even he fell short of God’s glory, and eventually got exposed of his nakedness before God.
5. Fifth, Jesus shows us that our nakedness and shortcomings can be overcome only with God’ help and through Christ himself. If we try to overcome these by our own strength and spin garments of self-righteousness, we will only wear out and dress up for appearances. By relying only on ourselves, our blossoming and fruit will be more illusion than reality. According to the Bible we can clearly see that we need Jesus to come to a real blossoming and bearing fruit, and to get a heavenly clothing covering our nakedness. Really, the Bible is very specific in this respect – it points directly to Jesus Christ as the One and Only suitable Outfit for us. In Romans 13:14 and Galatians 3:27 we can read to *“put on Christ, or clothe ourselves with Jesus”*. Even Isaiah says in 61:10 that *“God clothes us with garments of salvation and a robe of righteousness”*. This kind of dressing cannot be worked by ourselves, only with the help of God and through Jesus Christ.
6. Sixth, Jesus speaks to us of himself as an example for a righteous, true and beautiful Christian life. Christ lived and lives for the glory of God and always pursued to do the will of the heavenly Father. Jesus also cares for his disciples and ensures God’s provision for people putting their faith solely in him. Eventually, Jesus gave his all, his life, for us. He was and is God’s utmost

Provision and Clothing for us, the Cover of our nakedness. At the end of Jesus' earthly life, he was stripped off all dignity. He was put on the cross almost naked, for our sake. His body was dripping blood, and the soldiers cast the lots over his clothes. Christ died as a common man or like a flower dies, undressed from all natural beauty. Yet in the very end he rose to glory again at Easter, ascended to Heaven and is now seated with his Father, whereas we are equipped *"and clothed from on high"* with the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:8). But one day Christ will come back to earth to gather his believers or pluck his flowers, and his followers will be dressed in a white robe of pure light like the heavenly Jesus (Matthew 17:2, Mark 9:3, Revelation 3:1-6, 7:9).

7. Seventh, just like Jesus lived and lives for God's glory, so we should live our lives and grow and blossom and bear fruit and dress for his purpose. God has a heavenly purpose for our lives, which comes true and unfolds like a flower and brings glory to God here on this earth. In Ephesians 5:2 we can read that our lives shall be *"a sweet-smelling offering and sacrifice to God, like Christ gave himself for us."* Likewise, according to 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 *"God uses us to spread his knowledge everywhere like a sweet-smelling perfume. Our offering to God is to be the perfume of Christ that goes out to those who are being saved and to those who are being lost. To those who are being lost, this perfume smells like death, and it brings them death. But to those who are being saved, it has the sweet smell of life, and it brings them life."* We are to live like flowers spreading a heavenly aroma following the example of Christ. Ephesians 5:1 shows us that we should *"live a life of love, and love others just as Christ loved us."* Indeed, Jesus is the best, only true and most beautiful example for us and the world. He has all the qualities of the present life and the life to come. The garment and life of Christ may be not fashionable in our eyes or the sight of the world, but it is everlasting. Only through Jesus we are provided with a Christ-like outfit. He helps us to live an exemplary life thanks to his love towards us, as Colossians 3:12-14 reminds us: We, believers in Jesus, are *"a holy and dearly loved people"*, and thus we also *"clothe ourselves"* like Christ, *"with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, [forgiveness], and love, which binds all together in perfect unity."*

I want to end this sermon now with this last point. It is perhaps the one that requires much more consideration. Hence I ask you and all of us to think about or rather ponder on it during the new week ahead of us. If you wish, you may begin it already now as we will be looking at the flowers that we have collected in a [slideshow \(https://www.icloud.com/sharedalbum/#B0N532ODWBwOoF\)](https://www.icloud.com/sharedalbum/#B0N532ODWBwOoF). May our observing and considering of flowers on the screen and out there in nature, God's creation, encourage us to become more like Christ. Amen.