Good morning! Welcome to Our Savior’s Way. I hope, when you walked into church today you noticed something. What was it?—a smell—an aroma! Smells have the power to bring back to us wonderful memories, don’t they? What are the smells that bring back memories for you? Whenever I smell anise seed I think about Christmas and the wonderful German cookies called “springerle” that are part of our family tradition. Whenever I smell honeysuckle vines in bloom (as they are now) I think about long summer evenings and sipping the nectar out of a honeysuckle flower. When I smell hay think of my grandfather on his farm in southern Indiana. When I smell Emeraude perfume I think of my grandmother. Smell has the power bring back memories and the images of the people we love. Well, this morning I want to talk to you about what you smell like and what I smell like and what we smell like as a church. So, right now I want you to lean over and sniff the person next to you—just kidding. You don’t have to do that. Seriously, we are familiar with Christians being salt and Christians being light, but did you know that Christians also have a distinct odor. We’re in the 2nd week in our sermon series on 2nd Corinthians and I want you to open up your Bibles and look at 2 Corinthians 2:14-17. Paul tells us that we all have a smell—an aroma—which is the fragrance of Christ in our lives. In this Scripture, Paul gives us an image to remember. The image is a picture of a victory parade. Paul calls it a “triumphal procession.” Let’s read verse 14 together. “And thanks be to God, who in Christ, always leads us in triumphal procession.” This was an idea that the people of Corinth would have been familiar with. Whenever a victorious general returned to the City of Rome he was a given a ticker-tape parade. I want you to get a sense of
what that is like so here is a” triumphal procession.” Take a look at this clip from the movie *Gladiator*—the Emperor Commodus enters the City of Rome. (*Clip from Gladiator - Emperor Commodus enters Rome—first 50 seconds*)

For Paul, Jesus Christ is the leader of the parade. He is the one who has won the victory. The victory is at the cross, in the resurrection, It’s Jesus’ victory over sin, death and hell. It’s the greatest victory in history. Now, we who believe, ride with Christ in the victory procession. Look at these words from Paul’s 1st Letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 15:54-57)—“When the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O grave where is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

One of the characteristics of the Roman victory procession was the use of incense. Incense was burning everywhere as part of the celebration. Here’s the take home lesson for today. The role of the Christian in the world is to be like incense. When we come into the room other people should be able to “smell” the victory we have in Jesus Christ. Let’s read verse 14-17—“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. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.”

Two things here: (1) “Through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.” In other words, “As a Christian you have a smell that’s following you around.” I remember, one of our boys, when he was little got into his mother’s perfume and dumped a bottle over himself. He had a smell that followed him around for a while. For Christians this is how it works—wherever we go the “smell” of God goes with us. This means the Spirit of God, the power of God, the presence of God, the
knowledge of God follows you around and spreads out into the world through you, like a sweet aroma. So, let me ask you, “Can other people smell Jesus on you? Are you spreading the sweet aroma of God?”

Here’s the second thing: (2) In verse 16 Paul says, for some the fragrance of God is the aroma of life; for others it is the smell of death. Remember that triumphal procession into the City of Rome. There was a crowd of people following the emperor. Some were soldiers. They were part of the victory procession. For them the parade was about victory and success and triumph and everything that was good in life. But others were prisoners and captives. The emperor was bringing back to the City of Rome in chains to be slaves who would be eaten by lions or thrown into the Colosseum to be killed by gladiators—for them the incense of the victory procession wasn’t the smell of life—it was the smell of death. I’ll never forget going to visit this man in the hospital. It was a friend of a friend and this man was dying. He wasn’t a Christian, but he had agreed to see me. When I walked into the room I saw him hooked up to all kinds of monitors and tubes. In spite of all that we had a very nice visit. At the end I asked him if he would like to pray with me. He said, “No. I don’t believe in prayer and I don’t believe in God.” My friends, let me tell you, at that moment it stunk! Paul said, “We are the aroma of Christ to those who are being saved BUT ALSO to those who believe we smell good, but to those who choose not to believe, we don’t.”

Did you know that you and I each have our own unique smell? In her fascinating book *A Natural History of the Senses* Diane Ackermann writes: “Each person has an odor as individual as a finger print. A dog can identify it easily and recognize its owner even if he or she is one of a pair of identical twins.” Helen Keller was completely deaf and blind. Yet she believed that every person had a unique odor and she believed this odor developed over time. Think about that. How much time and money do we spend on deodorants and mouthwash and cologne perfume making sure we smell good. Maybe we ought to pay attention to the spiritual smells that develop over time. The smells exude through our atti-
tudes and actions.

As Christians we want to exude the aroma of Christ. How do we do that? There’s only one answer--spend time with Jesus. There is no better way to pick up the scent of your Savior than by spending time with Him—through prayer—through Bible reading—in a small group. There is an old tale about a traveler who stops to rest in a garden one hot day. After a while he resumed his journey, and he is not aware of a small lump of clay that he has picked up in his clothing. When he stops at an inn to rest that night he suddenly becomes aware of a beautiful fragrance. Nothing he can find in the room could possibly be responsible for such a wonderful perfume. As he searches for the source of the fragrance the piece of clay falls from his clothing and he realizes that the aroma is coming from the clay. “I don’t understand,” the traveler exclaims, “You are just a common piece of clay. Where did you get this wonderful perfume?” “It’s true,” comes the reply, “I am only a lump of clay (remember this is a fable so lumps of clay can talk) I have no sweet fragrance of my own. But I have been dwelling with a rose.” My friends, when we poor lumps of clay have dwelt for a while with Jesus Christ, we discover that our lives have been redeemed. And when we live our lives as true disciples and follow the example of our Savior, our words, our actions, our prayers, and our praise become a sweet fragrance to God in our world.