

**Preacher:** Pastor Twyla

**Scripture:** Ephesians 4:25-5:2

*So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. 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.*

This morning, we find ourselves once again learning from the teachings of the Apostle Paul, written in a letter of encouragement to the church in Ephesus. Prior to what was read to us this morning, Paul wrote about the importance of unity in the church, emphasizing that we all are loved and valued by God. We may be different in the way we look, in the variety of talents we have, and, in the ways, we do things, but we are all God’s beloved children; and we are called to work together in taking God’s love to the world.

Last week we read Ephesians 4:4-6, *“You were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly. You have one Master, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all. Everything you are and think and do is permeated with Oneness.”*

The Lectionary has us skip over verses 17-24; but I want to read to you verses 20-24. Paul says: “You learned Christ! My assumption is that you have paid careful attention to him, been well instructed in the truth precisely as we have it in Jesus. Since then, we do not have the excuse of ignorance, everything—and I do mean everything—connected with that old way of life has to go. It’s rotten through and through. Get rid of it! And then take on an entirely new way of life—a God-fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside and working itself into your conduct as God accurately reproduces his character in you.”

In summary, as Christians, we know the ways of Jesus. Jesus’ life on earth gives us the perfect example of Godly obedience and faithfulness. We can read all about him and his teaching in the Bible. So, we have no good excuses to allow our lives to become cluttered with sinful trash. We need to do some personal housecleaning to get rid of old or recurring sinful ways of life, meaning all of the ungodly ways of living, speaking and thinking. We need to clean house and allow God to live in and through us, **changing us from the inside out**, and when we do, God will reproduce his character in us.

Then in verse 25, Paul said, “What these things add up to then, or some translations simply state, “So then,” This simple phrase is significant, because it indicates Paul is going to go on to explain what all he said thus far means as we apply it to our lives.

He shared some instructions, which were not new instructions. They are directions, guidelines, rules, if you will, that we read about in other parts of the Old and New Testament. What is interesting to note about Paul’s sharing of these rules is that for almost every rule, a

principle is offered that underlies the rule and motivates its completion. None of the rules take the form of a threat; instead, each one appeals to the Christian identity that is considered a given.

First, Paul says telling the truth in love is a requirement for the Christian community because “we are members of one another.” The meaning of membership here is not meaning what we in the church might think of as being enrolled on some list of an organization. Instead, being a member signifies belonging to the same body, the body of Christ.

This means that when we are members of the body of Christ, we can no more tolerate lying to one another than the parts of one’s body can deceive one another. It just cannot be done. (My ear can’t say to the rest of my body it’s a foot, well, it could say it, but the rest of my body knows it’s not true.) Lying to each other disrupts unity by creating conflicts and destroying trust. It tears down relationships and leads to conflict among Christians.

But remember, we are instructed to tell the truth in love, which involves communication, speaking kindly and listening with an open and nonjudgemental mind. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13 that: “If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.” Later he says, Love does not dishonor people. It does not demand its own way.” Speak the truth in love.

Then Paul discusses anger. The instructions on anger may take some of us by surprise. Paul said, “Go ahead and be angry. You do well to be angry,” Most of the time we think of anger as being a bad thing, but that’s not always the case. There are times our world needs someone to rise up with anger when injustice occurs. Take for example, William Wilberforce; he was a deeply religious English member of parliament and social reformer who was very influential in the eradication of the slave trade and eventually slavery itself in the British empire. His anger expressed in a healthy manner changed things. Even Jesus got angry, in the temple and turned the money-changers tables over and left the livestock free because the people were using the temple to make money, not to truly worship God.

But Paul warns us against anger that leads to irritability and bad tempers. He warns against holding on to anger, nursing it, and perhaps using it as a weapon to tear someone down. Here’s where we find that familiar phrase, “Don’t go to bed angry.” Deal with your anger. If you don’t, beware, the evil one will walk through that open door and lead you astray, perhaps even taking others with you.

“During World War II, Zinaida Bragantsova of Ukraine was sitting by the window sewing. Suddenly she heard a whistling noise. When she came to, her sewing machine was gone, and there was a hole in the floor.

She told people there was a bomb in the floor, but she couldn’t get any officials to check out the situation. So, she moved her bed over the hole and lived with it for the next forty-three years.

Then, one day, phone cable was being laid in the area and demolition experts were called in to probe for buried explosives. “Where’s your bomb, Grandma?” asked the smiling army lieutenant of the woman. “No doubt, under your bed?”

“Under my bed,” Bragantsova responded dryly.

Sure enough, they found a five-hundred-pound bomb. After evacuating two thousand people from surrounding buildings, the bomb squad detonated the bomb. Bragantsova was moved to a new apartment.

Many people live as if they have a bomb under their bed. They cover up a terrible secret, a great hurt, a seething anger while everyone goes on about their business. But no one is truly safe until the bomb is uncovered and removed.”

William Barclay wrote: “The anger that is selfish and uncontrolled is a sinful and hurtful thing, which must be banished from the Christian life. But the selfless anger which is disciplined into the service of Christ and of our fellow men is one of the great dynamic forces of the world.”

Another assertion Paul makes about Christian living is in regard to making an honest living not just for personal benefit, but also to enable you to help others. Helping others is an answer to God’s call to serve others in need and it is a key to a meaningful, worthy life. Just as God has been generous to us, we should be generous to others.

In verse 29, Paul warns Christians to guard what comes out of our mouths, making sure every word we say, is something that points to our oneness with Christ, and that will build others up.

Paul also instructs us to forgive one another. Forgiveness must be practiced by Christians because as Paul wrote, “God in Christ has forgiven you.” Just as is the case with many other biblical passages, this verse cites God’s behavior as a motivational point for Christian behavior. God’s forgiveness of us teaches us what forgiveness is and requires us then, to act that forgiveness out in our own lives.

The truth is that those who are unwilling to forgive have not become one with Christ, who was willing to forgive even those who crucified him. (Luke 23:34, “Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”) Take notice a very important point here with Jesus: He forgave, even when those he forgave continued to hurt him, to the point of death. We are called to forgive, even though our gift of forgiveness may not be welcomed, even though we may continue to experience and feel hurt from those we forgive. When we do not forgive, we hurt ourselves by continuing to carry the burden; and we continue to say and do things that will hurt the one we do not forgive.

Paul offers these critical motivating words for Christians to do all of these things, “Don’t grieve God. Don’t break his heart. His Holy Spirit, moving and breathing in you, is the most intimate part of your life, making you fit for himself. Don’t take such a gift for granted.”

We have this wonderful gift of salvation that makes it possible to rid ourselves of the old and to make room for the Holy Spirit, who living in us helps to rid ourselves of the things Paul previously mentioned: bitterness, anger, fighting, slander and nastiness; and replaces these with compassion, kindness, and forgiveness. The Holy Spirit creates in us the desire to imitate Christ, even if others do not do the same. That makes it hard sometimes, but if we are truly connected to Jesus, Christians can overcome these things that create brokenness and heal festering wounds, even when the divide seems too great to overcome.

As we seek to imitate Christ and take up the endeavor to clean our spiritual house, we need to remember that it begins with ourselves, and not with changing others. We need to focus on Jesus, focus on Jesus, his teachings through word and example, and we need to practice it every day, and in every circumstance, be it simple or seemingly impossible.

A Pastor, Cynthia D. Weems, tells this story of building unity. “I served a church once where a husband-and-wife team served as the choir director and organist, respectively. They were both very accomplished on the piano and often played piano four hand pieces. They played these pieces beautifully. I once joked with them about how many hours they must spend practicing together and they responded in a way that surprised me. They explained that in order for them to play the four hand pieces well, they both had to have practiced the piece individually with ease and near perfection in order to be prepared to play the piece well together.”

Our relationships with each other are only as strong as we are willing to work at it. Paul knew that unless people were plugged into Jesus, they couldn’t very well plug into other

relationships in healthy ways. This scripture passage is a reminder of the importance of the personal and the communal. It is what binds us together into a finely woven spirit, the Spirit of Jesus.

Blind storyteller and songwriter, Ken Medema, wrote the popular song, “Bound Together”, a song about unity. The words of the chorus are, “We are bound together and finely woven, We are bound together and finely woven, We are bound together and finely woven, in love.” I love the imagery these words create in my mind’s eye. A finely woven piece, be it a rug, wall hanging, dishrag, whatever, is beautiful as a variety of threads are woven together to one piece. But the other image that comes to mind for me are the many COB National Youth conferences I have attended over the years in Fort Collins, Colorado. Ken was usually there to sing for the youth, singing songs he recorded, and composing new songs on the spot with information youth would give him.

I see as I remember, youth from all over the country, dancing or joining together in a conga line and singing this chorus, freely celebrating the unity they were feeling with Jesus and each other at that conference. It is a beautiful sight to behold, one that I am sure, certainly does not grieve God.

Let us Pray, Gracious God, who loves us and binds us together. As your children, we want to be like Jesus. Forgive us and help us to discard all bitterness, anger, rage, slander, all that is sinful and that causes disunity in your church and in our other relationships. Take us into your hands, fill us with your Spirit and help us to do what we cannot do alone. Weave us together in love. May our unity bring you joy. May the joy we find in our unity be used to glorify you in all the world. Amen.