

Ephesians 4:25 – 5:2  
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Friendship United Church

Our reading this week brings up a topic many don't associate with the church. Anger. We talk very little about anger. It rates right up there with sex and money. Why is that? Why do we shy away from talking about anger in the church? We all get angry; it is a basic human response to a variety of situations in our lives but could it be that if we talk about it in church we have to do something about it because church is the place we come to, to move us into action; to change the way we live we hope, for the better. If we bring our anger here we must deal with it, not necessarily in the way we want to or the way we are expected to.

We love our neighbour in our church service but really, if we told the truth we would love them more if they thought and acted like us. We say the words about loving our neighbour but we don't really have to act on them if we do not come across a situation that warrants it outside of the church walls. Very few of us defend our neighbours from racial slurs, sexist remarks, or derogatory comments in our everyday lives; in fact many of us participate even when we want to say something against it. We participate by not responding, our silence speaks for itself. Sometimes we remain silent for safety reason but more likely we remain silent because we don't want to rock the boat; rattle the cages; turn the tables in the temple so to speak. But this is only one part of the message in Ephesians.

Listen closely to these words from our text: "no more lies; no more pretence. When you lie to others, you end up lying to yourself."

Verse 26-27 says "Go ahead and be angry but don't use your anger as fuel for revenge". That's the part we don't like, that last part, don't use your anger as fuel for revenge. We are a society of revenge seekers. You did something against me so I will hold back something from you. What goes around comes around is more likely our motto.

And then there is this one: "make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk." I couldn't help but wonder what would be left to talk about in some cases?

This is a tough passage. Probably one of the hardest to live up to because it penetrates us to our core. It catches us where we don't want to be seen; in those quiet conversations in the corners of the room. Over coffee at Tim Horton's when certain people enter the store. Around kitchen tables when close friends gather and start to discuss. We all have been there and none of us wants to readily admit it, not even to God. And while we're telling the truth in love here Ephesians 5: 1 hits us again.

"Watch what God does, and then you do it." "Observe how Christ loved us, extravagantly. He didn't love to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that."

Does this message from Ephesians make you just a tiny bit uncomfortable because it should? Do the folks outside this church see us as loving like Jesus, loving like God or would our conduct betray us as followers of God? Oh sure we strive to be like God, even to “play” God but how do we do with imitating God’s love, forgiveness, and generosity sometimes known as grace and mercy. You remember grace and mercy?

Grace is the unmerited love and favour of God.

Mercy is kindness in excess of what is expected or demanded by fairness, forbearance and compassion. The power to forgive or be kind: clemency.

Oh the pain of telling the truth in love. Giving grace and mercy as God would give. Who us, the lowly human beings, sure it’s ok for God and Jesus to give grace and mercy but us - with all our flaws, and all our blemishes; can we be imitators of God in giving grace and mercy? God knows we could use a little mercy now!

Our world could use a little mercy; our neighbours could use a little mercy; our friends and our families could use a little mercy; and ourselves we could use a little mercy now. The power to forgive or be kind: clemency...and what power it is.

A few years ago I had the privilege of meeting and hearing Sister Helen Prejean lecture at Queen’s University. I think I have mentioned her before. She is the author of the book “Dead Man Walking” and her follow-up book, “The Death of Innocents: An Eyewitness Account of Wrongful Executions”. She asked us to think of the worst thing we have ever done in our lives and to imagine it being broadcast in audio and video in front of the entire gathering that evening, about 300 people.

Projected in front of our friends and colleagues; family and strangers; and then to imagine how that would feel in your soul, deep within your spirit. That, she told us, is the experience of hundreds of thousands of inmates. Their lives viewed and judged by a moment in time. This does not excuse their bad behaviour or undo what they have done but perhaps we could show a little mercy; the kind that Jesus and God would show. There is such power in forgiveness, not power over but power within. The power of love and kindness and humility; the power of truth in love.

This is the kind of power Jesus brought to us. This is the power he spoke of to over-take the Romans in his time and the power he wants us to use in our day and time. This power within us frees us from our bondage; frees us from being stuck in a rut; frees us to release our anger and move forward in our lives. Power within not power over.

What angers flare up within you and the body of our church, within the community of our church's setting, its neighbourhood? How much of the world's conflict is caused by anger nurtured for years and generations? Is anger ever justified, for example, on the part of those suffering injustice over many years? How should it be expressed? Does such anger have any value?

These are extremely tough questions with no easy answers. I think of those whose lives have been filled with violence, abuse, victimization and wonder how they ever forgive, how they ever show mercy and yet those who do, report that their lives improved greatly once forgiveness had been given. One such story is that of Immaculee Ilibagiza, a woman who survived the Rwandan holocaust of 1994. In her book "Left To Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust" Immaculee tells how she survived 91 days in a closet-sized bathroom, 4 feet long and 3 feet wide, with 7 other women, while genocide took place outside the hidden bathroom. They took turns sitting and standing in the cramped space. It is estimated that more than one million people were murdered in roughly 100 days including Immaculee's parents and two of her three siblings.

This is just a small piece of her story.

Read from Left To Tell...pages xix – xx and 203-204

Forgiveness is all I have to offer. The power to forgive or be kind: clemency...mercy

We could all use a little mercy now.

Amen