

August 12, 2018 @ First United Swift Current

Ephesians 4:25-5:2 Be Imitators of God, in Forgiveness and Love....**And to see God in one another.**

*4: 25. So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another. 26-27. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. 28. Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labour and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. 29. 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. 30. and do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. 31 Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, 32 And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. 5:1- 2. 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.*

The letter of Paul to the Ephesians discusses the role and mission of the church and life within it. Ephesians was written for the newly baptized Christians, who had heard the Gospel and responded. They were experiencing a radical transformation of their personal and social identity. Ephesians tells us to live our lives in the way that is God's calling. It is about unity.

It begins by telling us to speak the truth. That sounds like a simple, easy command to follow. 'Do this because we are members of one another'. The community members form one body. The unity of the church depends on moral behaviour. Thieves are told they must give up stealing and go out and earn an honest living, so they can share with those who need it.

Anger: verse 31 uses the words bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, slander and malice; all of these feelings represent a threat to our moving forward in our 'new life'. If these reactions are not dealt with they will hide themselves and show up in some other way. Congregations are not immune to versions of anger or

hostility. Avoiding the issue probably won't work but 'speaking the truth' in honest, straightforward exchange may be worth trying. With compassion, and the understanding that the other person is probably doing the best they can.

To paraphrase Sharon Jaynes, addressing women, "Let's silence the lies stealing our confidence and look into the mirror of God's truth. Many women live in a house of mirrors believing distorted reflections of who they are. The House of Mirrors brings on feelings of inferiority, insecurity, and of inadequacy. We can feel misshapen by others' words. Let's silence the inner critic holding us hostage. Silence the lies stealing our confidence and look into the mirror of God's truth."

There is no place for negative talk. But building each other up—that is what we can do, so that your words give grace to those who hear. Brene Brown, in her book *Rising Strong* has come to believe that most people are really doing the best they can. Our circumstances; of education, upbringing, environment, mental state are some factors that affect behaviours. When she asked others what they thought, most were affirmative; yes, in general, people do the best they can. Those who were in agreement were mostly not willing to give up on humanity. It doesn't mean they can't change or grow, they are doing the best they can at the time. Her husband said, 'all I know is that my life is better when I assume that people are doing their best. It keeps me out of judgment and lets me focus on what is; not what should be, or could be.'

So, be honest—help those who are in need and consciously build each other up; still a good basis for building and strengthening community.

30. *Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.* Earlier we were told it is through the Spirit that we have access to God. Building community brings us together. Spirituality is recognizing and celebrating that we are all linked to one another by a power greater than all of us. Our connection to that power and to one another is grounded in love and belonging.

These commands are more challenging than they first seem. But they remind us of the possibilities of making the effort to genuinely live in community.

5:1-2 *Therefore be imitators of God and live in love as Christ loved us.*

Think how kids, or we, might dress up to be like our favourite super hero; imitating that hero.

I have play dates with our neighbour kids, a 1 year and 3 year old. The 3 year old might sit with me at the piano where I write the chords on a song sheet for a sing-song at the Care Home. In her mind that is part of playing piano, writing on a piece of paper. Right now she is exploring the piano and making her own accompaniment.

We are Imitating: dressing up as Superman doesn't give you super powers, picking up a pencil doesn't make you a musician. If you're in a House of Mirrors, you probably won't see God. The adage 'What Would Jesus Do', emulating God, recognizing that those around us are doing the best they can and appreciate and love them for that; surely that puts us on the right path toward reconciliation and living in community.

Ephesians reminds us that the church is called to reflect God's love.

General Council 43 met in July and elected our new moderator, Rev. Richard Bott. When he met with the press following his election, he acknowledged the United Church of Canada is changing. Communication is vital in the new model. In this new model, those structures we've been creating are to help communities of faith and individuals to live into their faith and do their ministry. We want this to work, to live into the ministries, build trust and let go of our fear.

We all need to enter into relationship with people in a variety of places, it's not just up to the ministers and moderator.

To define the work over the next three years; it is General Council's decision that this triennium is the beginning place it is about discipleship, to explore our relationship with God and Christ and deepen that relationship.

These are interesting times and we can make it great opportunity.

Thanks be to God.