

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev. Dana VanVliet-Pullin, Deacon
St. Aidan's Episcopal Church
Virginia Beach VA 23452
www.aidanvbva.net

August 9, 2015

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

LET US GROW TOGETHER IN LOVE

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

Our readings have been from Ephesians for the last four weeks and again we are continuing in Ephesians today. Paul has been talking to the church in Ephesus, now Turkey; and today he is telling them how they need to think before they speak, speak out in truth and love and follow Christ's example. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit, put away bitterness, slander, unwholesome talk and let your words be words of building others up according to their needs. We are to walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself us for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

This is part of a letter addressed to the members of a very young church, intended to help them live together in their new relationship as a community of God's people. Changed by their devotion to Jesus Christ, they struggled, as did all the early churches, to live out their new commitment in the ways they interacted with each other and with the community around them. If we're looking for guidance, we find the same advice across time and faiths and even in popular culture.¹

“If you can't say something nice don't say anything at all.”

There's a Sufi saying: Before you speak, let your words pass through three gates. At the first gate, ask yourself 'Is it true.' At the second gate ask, 'Is it necessary.' At the third gate ask, 'Is it kind.'¹

Father Alan Redpath formulated a rubric, using the word “think.”

T—Is it true?

H—Is it helpful?

I—Is it inspiring?

N—Is it necessary?

K—Is it kind?¹

I know it is easy to say we need to stop before we speak but there are times words just come out without any thought, just a gut reaction but that it was Paul is telling us we need to work on. I think of the familiar statement that has been printed on wristbands, necklaces, bookmarks and other articles, “What would Jesus Do?” Sometimes we laugh when we hear someone say it because it seems like it is so cliché now and doesn’t really mean anything because people just throw it out in conversation but don’t take it seriously.

I’m afraid living in the modern world in which we have so many more ways to fly off the handle at each other doesn’t give us the time to think about what we say. There are too many ways to respond instantly and staying part of a community in which we are challenged every day to be gentle, forgiving and forbearing is difficult.¹ But being part of such a struggling, wrestling messy community as the Christian church is the only recipe I know for spiritual growth and maturity.²

So if we really take the statement, “What would Jesus Do?” seriously before we spoke or acted what would we do, what would we say, how would we act? Jesus told us in our reading we are to walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself us for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

I believe one way that can help with walking in love like Christ and learning how to act and talk with love is by looking back at last week’s sermon by Mark, in the reading from Ephesians last week Paul said “God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and tell it in love—like Christ in everything. We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do.”

Mark also referred to Br. Mark Brown from Society of St John the Evangelist and what his word for the day had been, “Compassion.”

Compassion

How can we lift up Christ in our hearts and in the world? I think this is done most compellingly by keeping the focus on the person of Jesus himself. The way we live is given shape by love for others and compassion for their suffering and concern for their welfare.

-Br. Mark Brown

I believe if we live our lives in love of Christ and others in our church and community ours words will change, our heart will change and before we speak we will think about what we say and how we act instead of just letting words spill out of our mouths that can hurt others.

I know I have talked to you before about a homeless ministry I started at my last church. The church had different ministries that they were already involved in but were not making that face to face connection with the people the ministry was for. The homeless, the battered women, the runaway children were not having that contact that is so important. They did not see the face, the hands and feet of Christ in the world they live in. They didn't hear the loving and kind words of care and support from others. They were thankful for the boxes of goods that were received in the shelters but it wasn't human contact.

We also have ministries here at St Aidan's and one of them is to hand out Manna Bags to people who are standing out on street corners but would we get out of the car and talk to them? Driving by with our hand out the window holding a bag while most of the time we still may be coasting forward with our car because of the traffic, it is a ministry but without words. Could it be because of the words we have said about them, the words we've heard by others, like they can find a job their just lazy, they stand on this corner every day; they probably make more money than we do? Words like this is what Paul talked about and said can be untruthful, hurtful, grieve the Holy Spirit because they are words that are not spoken in love like Christ would to these people, we are not walking in His love, and we have not asked ourselves, "What would Jesus do?"

I am not telling you to stop and get out of your car because what we are doing with Manna Bags is important but after asking ourselves, "What would Jesus do?" let us think about that because there is another way to reach out to the homeless that has opened up for St Aidan's.

If Kevin and I did not work with the ministry in downtown Norfolk we would not have heard a homeless man say that just when he thought God had given up on him and that God didn't even remember who he was there were people that came who cared about him and gave him a clean pair of socks and a warm meal on a cold windy day and showed God had never left him.

This ministry needs our help in downtown Norfolk, I know this ministry is not in downtown Virginia Beach, but Virginia Beach does not allow churches to set up tables and feed the homeless. This Norfolk ministry is our way to reach out and become the face, the hands and feet of Christ in the world they live in. Kevin and I will be making sandwiches on the third Sunday of every month in the kitchen between services for the homeless ministry and going to feed the homeless on the last Saturday morning of every month. We would love to have St Aidan's become involved in this ministry with us.

We aren't out here doing it alone. We are loved by God, loved so much that God became one of us in Christ Jesus. I believe God is working for us and in us and through us, calling us to be beloved children and to live in love.

Live in love.

Maybe that's the intention we need, before we speak. Amen.¹

1. <http://marthaspong.com/category/ephesians-425-52/>
2. <https://inaspaciousplace.wordpress.com/2012/08/09/ephesians-425-52-a-community-that-grows-together/>