

Our reading from Ephesians is sort of a “how to”. Paul is telling us what this life that Jesus gives looks like. He tells his readers that we are to be imitators of God. It does not mean we are perfect - no, far from it! In fact Paul acknowledges in this passage that Christians do get angry! Its what you do with the anger - and what you do with your words that matter.

No we are not perfect as we try to follow the way of Jesus and to be imitators of God. But as Christians we know that the Spirit is working in our lives so that our words and our actions and our attitudes will be ones that bring reconciliation, love of neighbour and forgiveness.

This passage from Ephesians really comes down to building up the community - not tearing it down. Paul says - do not let the sun go down on your anger - my Grandma used to say that alot as well! Paul wants the Ephesians to forgive one another - to ensure that the community can remain united. Paul asks his readers to be kind to one another - this has become a covid slogan! But its still very good advice. Paul also spends some time reminding the Ephesians that words can wound. This is really an important point for all of us. As we hear this - or read it.....are we feeling judged? We all know that words can hurt.

You probably remember the childhood chant - “sticks and stones can break my bones, but your words will never hurt me”. We are told to say this to people whose words are

hurting us! Yes words can hurt a lot. Words can wound deeply and the hurtful words we might remember and hold onto far longer than the loving ones.

Paul is not naive - this preacher has seen it all - this pastor has heard it all. He knows what these communities are like. He knows what Church is like. He knows that the people walking in the way of Jesus are trying to imitate God. Trying to live and love as Jesus did. But they fail. We fail. We say things in anger. We say things we should not say.

And Paul reminds us in this passage from Ephesians that we should think twice before we say things! Paul wants the Ephesians to only say things that build up the community.

It is so easy to use our words to tear down another person. To speak from a place of anger. To want to use our words to hurt. But Paul says that this is evil. Use your words to build up the community. Use your words to build up one another. Be kind. Love one another. Be tenderhearted and full of forgiveness. Do this because we are one - we were made for each other.

But what about those we do not know? Those who are not part of the community? What about them? Paul would tell us that we are to love not only one another - but all our neighbours. Strangers are only siblings we have not yet met.

We are all part of the body of Christ. Which means that we have the strength to do what is set before us. As part of this body we are to encourage one another - to help one another. Paul knew better than many what building up a community was about . We are all in this together - another covid slogan! But Paul believed that we were all in this enterprise of being Church - together. We are to learn from one another. Speech matters, words matter because they build up or tear down a community.

I recently re-read Marcus Borg's book "Meeting Jesus again for the first time." I like Marcus Borg alot - and this book was well worth picking up again. I was thinking about the book as I read today's passage from Ephesians. Borg asks if we have a static view of the Christian view? Or do we see the Christian life as a journey? Is the religious life a journey? Is being part of a community a once and for all or a journey? Borg says that being Christian **is** about going on a journey.

Borg says - you are accepted. You have become part of a community - or as Paul would say - you have become a member of the body of Christ. We are one. But what now?

What do you need to hear? Do you need to hear words of liberation from bondage? Do you need to hear words of homecoming? Do you need to hear words of acceptance?

Are you hearing what you need to hear? Is your community building you up or tearing you down? Are the words you hear building you up or tearing you down?

We are one body. We are imitators of God. We are following in the way of Jesus. But we are not perfect and sometimes our words and our anger can damage and wound. Paul knew this. Paul acknowledged it and then said - be kind - build up one another. Love one another and love the stranger too. Paul said forgive. Not easy things to do once we have been wounded. Once we have been hurt and torn down.

We do not do these things alone. We know that the Spirit is working in us to transform us. To make us new. So use your words to build up - to strengthen community. May our words be the words our sisters and brothers need to hear. Words of love. Words of grace. Words that heal.

AMEN