

St. Andrew’s Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Ephesians 4:25-5:2

“Behave Yourself!”

Jesus proclaimed His true identity in last week’s Holy Gospel of John and he continued in this week’s continuation in that same chapter – making it clear with His statement *“I am the Bread of Life.”* We know that the words *“I AM”* steer us to one truth - *“I AM”* is God, *“I AM the Bread of Life.”* In preparing a message for today I was drawn to our Epistle reading written by the Apostle Paul’s letter the church at Ephesus about our behavior and how we are to treat one another in any kind of relationship to be of incredible importance as well. I am sure you have heard the old question: *“why can’t we just get along?”* Paul in the whole Epistle to the Ephesians tries to give those people a wakeup call how we are supposed to be – and we can learn from that as well.

At the very beginning of the service we heard the Summary of the Law - that we are to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind and with all your soul, and the second is like it, that you are to love your neighbor as yourself. How we behave is not just about how we are when we are in church – but there are several important questions that we need to reflect upon and ask ourselves:

- How do you treat the person who serves you a meal at a restaurant? Especially if they bring you the wrong thing.
- Do you treat them with respect or do you snarl at them, and sneer, and talk down to them? Do you treat them as a servant or like another person who is working hard to feed their family?
- How do you treat the person who is scanning your items at Harvey’s at the checkout line? (or at Walmart?)
- How do you treat the person who is sitting right next to you in church?

The Lord is concerned about how the church is behaving, especially toward one another and so He inspired the Apostle Paul to write about relationships.

Let’s turn to page 1819 in your Pew Bibles – beginning with verse 25 of chapter 4. *“Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up*

Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost, August 12, 2018, Liturgical Year “B”

for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Ephesians 4:25-5:2) Have you ever heard that before? At the Offertory “Now walk in love as Christ loved us and gave Himself for us – a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” We hear it every Sunday – does it sink in? Do we do what we are supposed to do?

Apparently, the people of the early church in Ephesus were not the kindest people you might meet. Remember the person who was crawling along, following or right below the speed limit, in the car right in front of you yesterday? How did you react to them? In New York you would be honking your horn! That is frowned upon here in the south. When you went around them did you look at them? Did you make any comments or gestures? Did they do any back to you? Let’s face it – it happens. It is called “road rage” – it is bad – and we are not supposed to treat each other that way. You know “we have to get there first – we have got someplace to be!” You know what amazes me – people seem to take forever making a right turn! You are driving along 441 – north or south – and all of a sudden the blinker goes on – about a half a mile before they are gonna turn – and then they slow down to a crawl, and turn *E v e r s o s l o w l y* into the driveway. WHY? They have something on their mind while they are doing it – but they have to do it their way.

The Apostle Paul writes that good behavior is not and should not be negotiable – that it is unconditionally necessary for us to be considerate of one another. First, we have got to be honest with one other. Think back to verse 25: “*Speak truthfully to your neighbor.*” This is a reference to God speaking through the Prophet Zechariah saying: “*These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other and render true and sound judgment in your courts; “do not plot evil against each other, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this,” declares the LORD.*” (Zechariah 8:16-17)

Have you ever thought about the person who did that very slow turn – that they might have been doing it just to get your dander up? Or maybe it is just the way they are. You have got to love them anyway - it is not easy!

All of this behavior has its’ own names:

- backbiting,
- lies,
- false witness against your neighbor, (did you see what so and so was doing?)
- rumors, (did you see what Zelda did yesterday?)
- gossip.

It is like a massive net – that is filled with lies. The fact remains that none of them are any good for the Body of Christ. It is also important that we be the same person that people see here in church – all of the time. Who are you when no one is looking? Are you the same person that gets all dressed up to come to church on Sunday, or maybe to go to the doctor’s office, or to the Kiwanis Club, to the Rotary Club, to the Chamber of Commerce, or whatever it might be?

Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost, August 12, 2018, Liturgical Year “B”

Paul’s message is to the church – of both yesterday and today to very simply “behave yourself!” Get off your high horse thinking that you are better than anyone else or that your schedule is more important than anyone else. Be truthful; watch what you say and even how you say it. Words can have an unbelievable impact on any relationship. And Paul says that while you are at it - do not steal, and don’t give the enemy a foothold by holding onto anger. Have you ever seen someone who is angry and filled with rage? Their face really shows it – you can see their veins bulging in their neck and their temples are throbbing. When we are labeled as Christians, the spotlight is on you! Let me correct that – it is not only a spotlight – but a target as well. People are watching how you are behaving. “Oh, they have a fish on their car – I want to see how they act.” “They are hypocrites calling themselves Christians!” Paul is telling all believers to not be hypocrites – calling themselves Christians but acting nothing like a Christian. People become confused as they watch the behavior and language of people who say they are Christians – and they are completely turned off, thinking – “do I really want to be like that?” The behavior is not only visible today but was most certainly visible in St. Paul’s day as well – causing Paul to write letters to the churches that he ministered to – like Ephesus and Corinth. When we do all of the things that Paul warns us of, we ignore God’s message – and that is what grieves the Holy Spirit – because we mistreat our brothers and sisters in Christ – other believers!

We are all called to be kind and considerate of one another. Jesus knows that we are not perfect; remember He walked the earth enduring all that we endure - except He did not sin! I truly believe that Jesus understands that it would be impossible to ask someone to not get angry at all. He got angry. In verse 26 of Ephesians chapter 4 – in which Paul cautions us to not sin in our anger. This refers to Psalm 4:4 – which says to go ahead and be angry, but do not sin! Do you take medication for your blood pressure? It is part of today’s life. If you suppress the anger – it is not going to help you. Holding it in might cause you more harm than good. Jesus got angry. In three of the Gospels - Matthew 21:12, Mark 11:15, John 2:14-15 – Jesus became angry with the merchants in the Temple, but His was a righteous anger – and it did not lead Him to sin. He hurt no one but He drove them out of His Father’s house. Paul reminds us that we need to follow Jesus’ example – because anger that is allowed to smolder and burn over time can eventually burst into flame, and if it does it will give an enormous foothold to the devil. On the other hand, our anger needs to be handled properly, by not indulging angry feelings, letting them lead to pride, or hatred or even seeming a feeling of self-righteousness.

My Mom and Dad promised each other that they would never go to bed angry – Scripture tells us “*do not let the sun go down while you are still angry*” and Marilyn and I made that very same promise to each other – even before the 41 years ago when we got married. It has been a tremendous blessing.

It all boils down to how we deal with each other in our relationships, not just about marriage. How do we treat one another? How do we treat the ones that we love? How do we treat co-workers? How do we treat those that we don’t even know? Many times, we look at what is

Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost, August 12, 2018, Liturgical Year "B"

written as sort of "something to strive for" or only meant for weddings. For example – in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 – St. Paul writes: *"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud." "It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs." "Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth." "It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." "Love never fails."* I know - it sounds like a wedding – and if you were hearing it at a wedding, like it was read at ours 41 years ago – it would most certainly fit – BUT – it was NOT written for bride and groom. These words were written to the church - as a reminder of how we are to behave ourselves toward one another. These words work beautifully as a reminder for all of us - in any relationship!

The love between a husband and wife is to be a visual expression of the love between Christ and the church, but the love between friends and members of the Body of Christ is to be a reflection of that very same love. When there are disagreements it would be good for us to remember that there are 12 important words to keep in mind. When a couple gets married - they come together in Holy Matrimony and I try to remind them of these 12 words – and they are great reminders to all of us today! The Twelve Words are: "I was wrong," "I am sorry," "Please forgive me," and "I love you." Each of those groups of words reveals a willingness to overcome all obstacles and to admit that your relationship is more important and is worth all of the effort, putting aside anger, pride and working together. "I was wrong," "I am sorry," "Please forgive me," and "I love you." These go hand in hand with Paul's words in verses 31 and 32: *"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."* "I was wrong," "I am sorry," "Please forgive me," and "I love you."

We, as believers should follow God's example. Kindness is one of the purest forms of the imitation of God.

- How would you feel if God were the kind of god who was always making vicious or nasty remarks toward you?
- How would you feel if you felt that you couldn't trust God to tell you the truth or if He was always losing His temper with you?
- Let me ask you: how do people feel about us if that is what we are like? How wonderfully blessed we are that we have an example that we follow – His Name is Jesus Christ - who the true God is and that He is the standard that we are to aim for!

This great love for us led God the Father to sacrifice His own Son Jesus Christ, so that we might live. We can do that by following Christ's example – of which the Apostle Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 2:21-24 *"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."*

Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost, August 12, 2018, Liturgical Year “B”

Each one of us has been called to live a life filled with love for others – fully transformed through our relationship with Jesus Christ. Through that transformation we should show the same kind of love that He showed for us to others. Our Lord Jesus willingly gave Himself as a sacrifice to take away our sins – a blood sacrifice that was acceptable to Almighty God – “*a fragrant aroma*” that was pleasing to the Father. It is my prayer that these words will mean so much more to you each time you hear them: “*Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*”