

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Ephesians 4:25-5:2

"Consistent Christians"

Last week and this week, the two Gospel readings are very similar, dealing with Jesus speaking to the people proclaiming His true identity – *"I am the Bread of Life."* No one can get to the Father without receiving the Bread of Life – and that is Jesus Christ, Our Lord. It is not about how we behave – but it is about who we know, and who we love. The Apostle Paul today speaks to us – to His church about our behavior and how we are to treat one another in any kind of relationship. We sang two hymns this morning - the first *"In the Garden,"* which is about a relationship, walking in the garden with God, and you know that the only person of the Trinity who could walk in the garden is the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ, who walked in the garden with our first father and mother, Adam and Eve. Jesus walks with us each and every day when we let Him, when we invite Him in. What a precious relationship! And then we sang a song to which thousands, if not hundreds of thousands have given their lives to Christ during Billy Graham Crusades, *"Just As I Am, Without One Plea,"* how precious! Paul tells us what to do with that humility, and how we are supposed to be.

I stood here at the beginning of the service and gave you 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. What I need to tell you today is that how we behave is not just about we are when we are in church – but there are several important questions that we need to ask ourselves:

- How do I treat the person who delivers the newspaper to you?
- How do I treat the person who is scanning your items at the store at the checkout line?
- How do I treat the person sitting next to you in church?

The Apostle Paul is concerned about how the church is behaving, especially toward one another. I thought it was very interesting that as I said that – many looked right at the person next to them! How delightful! That is relationship.

I want to look at the entire passage from Ephesians – and the extra, for us to see the context; to get the full gist of his meaning; this is called exegesis. Let me read the entire passage to you – so that you can understand the spirit in which he wrote this letter to the church. (You can follow along on 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

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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 for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (Ephesians 4:25-5:2)

Wow, that is a lot to take in right there! Based on the letter, it seems to me that the people of the early church in Ephesus were not the kindest people that you might meet. Well, come to think of it – that guy that cut you off today on your way to church wasn't so nice either. And how did you react when that happens? See what I mean.

The Apostle Paul writes that good behavior **is not** and **should not be negotiable** – that it is absolutely necessary for us to be considerate of one another. First and foremost – **we need to honest with each other**. Think back to verse 25: *“speak truthfully to your neighbor.”* This is a reference to the Prophet Zechariah through who God tells us *“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) There are many names for this behavior:

- backbiting,
- lies,
- false witness against your neighbor,
- rumors,
- gossip.

The fact remains that none of them are any good to the Body of Christ. It is also important that we be the same person that people see in church – all of the time. And so I want to ask a question and this is meant for each one of us: **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, or the Rotary Club, or whatever it might be?

Paul is telling the church – of both yesterday and today to “behave yourself!” Be truthful; watch what you say and how you say it. Words can have a tremendous impact on any relationship. And 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? Their face shows it. My father said I have a poker face. When I am upset or angry – you know! I stop talking, you know – we have these signs that show people. Remember the old song *“And They'll know we are Christians by our love?”* When we are labeled as Christians, the spotlight is on you! People are watching and wondering how you are behaving. Paul is asking believers to not be hypocrites – calling themselves Christians but not acting like a Christian. You don't know how many people, especially young people, become terribly confused – as they watch the behavior and language of people who say they are Christians – and 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 him to write letters to the churches that he visited and ministered to – like Ephesus. When we do all of the things that Paul warns us of – that is what grieves the Holy Spirit – when we mistreat our brothers and sisters in Christ!

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Simply said - we are called to be considerate of one another. The Lord knows that we are not perfect; remember He endured everything on earth that we endure - except He did not sin! I believe He understands that it would be too much to ask someone to not get angry at all. In verse 26 of Ephesians chapter 4 – in which Paul cautions us to be careful not to hold on to anger. This refers to Psalm 4:4 –which says to go ahead and be angry, but do not sin! If we repress legitimate anger – we will do ourselves more harm than good. How many of us take blood pressure medication? It might be because we hold things in! It doesn't mean you are supposed to walk around with a snarl on your face or growling at people. Holding it in at one point might cause you to implode. I want to point out that Jesus Himself became angry at the merchants in the Temple (Matthew 21:12, Mark 11:15, John 2:14-15) but His was a righteous anger – and did not lead Him to sin. Paul reminds us that we need to follow the Lord's example – because anger that is allowed to smolder and burn over time can eventually burst into flame, and give an enormous foothold to the devil! On the other hand – we do need to handle our anger properly,

- not indulging angry feelings,
- letting them lead to pride,
- or hatred
- or even self-righteousness.

I learned a wonderful lesson from my parents a long time ago – who 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 same promise to each other – 38 years ago when we became husband and wife. What a tremendous blessing it has been!

The long and the short of all of this is how we deal with our relationships. It is not just about marriage. How do we treat one another? How do we treat the ones that we love? How do we treat those that we don't even know? Many times we look at what is written as sort of “something to strive for” or is 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 our 38 years ago – it would most certainly fit – BUT – this was NOT written for bride and groom. These words were written to the people of God – the church - as a reminder of how we are to behave toward one another. These words work beautifully as a reminder for all of us - **in any relationship!**

Just as the love between husband and wife is to be a visual expression of the love between Christ and His bride, the church, the love between friends and members of the Body of Christ is to be a reflection of that very same love. Part of that love is remembering that when there are disagreements – that there are 12 important words that you must never forget. I always make a point to remind a couple when they come together in Holy Matrimony of these 12 words – and they are great reminders to all of us today! The Twelve Words are: “**I was wrong,**” “**I am**

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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 so very important and is worth all of the effort to maintain – putting aside anger, pride and working together. “I was wrong,” “I am sorry,” “Please forgive me,” and “I love you.” This goes 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.”*

Robert Gagnon, author and theologian at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary has said: “True Biblical love desires what is best for the beloved, namely, eternal life through Christ. When Jesus addressed the woman caught in adultery, He said *“Neither do I condemn you; go your way. From now on sin no more.”*” (John 8:11)

Just as children imitate their parents – we 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 learn through Jesus - who the true God is and that He is the standard that we are to aim for!

The great love for us led God the Father to sacrifice His own Son, Yeshua, Jesus, 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.”*

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 can 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. Even greater than the sacrifices which took place on the altars of the Temple in Jerusalem, the burnt offerings, which were a pleasing aroma to Almighty God – the perfect sacrifice that took place on the cross at Calvary - **exceeded them all by far.** It is my prayer that these words will mean so much more to you each time you hear them: *“Now walk in love as Christ loved us and gave Himself for us, an offering and fragrant sacrifice to God.”*