

Ephesians 4:25-5:2 12th Sunday after Pentecost August 10, 1997

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

*5Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, 2and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

There is a game called Bandu - I have the game here - two or three or four play, each placing a piece upon the ones that have been placed at the beginning. The stack of pieces grows higher and more unstable. Until finally the whole stack tumbles.

A game? a picture of life?

How well any one piece will work depends on what is underneath it, what supports it.

Take this piece - call it truth. See how well it fits when placed upon this piece; call it members of one another in Christ.

But take the same piece, truth, try to place it upon the piece called only I am important - everything falls.

When I speak truth to you, because of love for you in Christ how different it is than if I tell you the truth - plaster the world with the truth - a truth built upon anger or rivalry or envy.

This morning's second lesson is a collection of pieces of advice. You could find many of the same pieces of advice in Reader's Digest, or as part of a school program intending to build self-esteem. But with each piece of advice given in Ephesians there is also given the piece that holds it up. Listen:

*So then, putting away all falsehood let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another.* Your belonging to one another in Christ is a solid foundation for truth. You belong in this community because Christ has loved you, forgives you, has made you members of his own body, his very self. Truth put on top of what Christ has done will not wobble or fall. Even if the truth about me or you should be very unattractive, we can tell the truth about ourselves. In Christ we remain one.

Truth - yes. Built upon the foundation of our being one in Christ.

*Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil.*

Anger.

Anger is a very tricky piece with which to build.

Put it within the stack and leave it there and anger will bring great towers tumbling down.

Hanging onto anger is to make room for the devil.

Sometimes I do just that. It is like in me there is a room that I let anger have - a room that I must keep Christ out of so that forgiveness and mercy and love cannot take away the anger.

Nursing a grudge.

Hanging onto the hurt.

*Do not let the sun go down on your anger.*

*Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy.*

What a surprise those words are to me. I expect, Thieves stop stealing -it's wrong. But no, instead sharing with the needy is the reason. All Christians are invited to share, even those who have so little they might be tempted to steal.

*Let no evil talk come from 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.*

Whenever I try to build up myself, evil talk is sure to follow: a word that decreases a neighbor.

When you hear me say it you know that it is I that is diminished.

But our Lord Jesus Christ who could rightly judge you and I so very harshly, chooses to remember only his love for us. His word to you is always his love, his forgiveness, a word of grace. You are invited to build upon his word, your words giving grace to your neighbor.

*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption.*

You are already sealed for salvation. Do not bring sadness to God.

*Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you.*

The foundation upon which you build is God's forgiving you in Christ. Bitterness, wrath, anger, slandering, wrangling - none of these balance upon the forgiveness you have received. God in Christ has forgiven you.

*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 love of God in Christ is the only foundation for your life. Every other foundation upon which you build will crash down upon you. Success at soccer is not a safe foundation for your life, nor good grades, a big house and wealth. Your protecting your health is not a safe foundation for your life, nor your success in raising children, or playing golf.

I am privileged to be with people who are nearing the end of their life. Sometimes when a life has been built upon all the wrong things the last days are all a terror, physical pain only a small part of the loss. But when Christ the bread of life has been daily food, when love has been the building block rather than bitterness or anger, when sharing and receiving have been practiced through a lifetime, then there is peace and faith and hope, and I give thanks.

Build your life on Christ - his love, his forgiveness, his word.

What you build upon him will stand on into eternity.