

New life, new community

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill

Sunday August 8, 2021

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

This morning we get a picture of what the church should look like as a new community called by Jesus, and formed as God's own.

Jesus told us that the kingdom of God has come amongst us, and those of us who are following Jesus, who have been baptized into the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, are a new creation, and together we form a new community.

So what does a community of Jesus followers look like – how do we strive to live together?

What does a Kingdom of God Community in North Bay, Ontario in the year 2021, look like?

Paul describes it in Ephesians.

I want to back up a few verses and read the foundation verses.

Paul insists that people who have claimed Jesus as the Lord of their lives, who have learned about Jesus, and been instructed in faith, are to live differently than they did, and differently from the world around them.

He says:

*That, however, is not the way of life you learned ²¹ when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²² **You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.***

And then Paul gets specific so there is no question about what he means:

Vs 25 What this adds up to, then, is this: no more lies, no more pretense. Tell your neighbor the truth. In Christ's body we're all connected to each other, after all.

So in this community of people who live under the rule and reign of Jesus we don't lie, but more than that we aren't pretentious and tell each other the truth.

We aren't here to impress each other.

We aren't here to pretend that we are something we are not.

Here we speak the truth to each other – we don't hide, we don't pretend, we can be honest, we can speak the truth.

And why can we do that?

Because we are all connected to each other.

We are part of one body, we serve one Lord, we are joined by one baptism, and so we dare to speak the truth in love.

Paul says that anger has a place in the church.

Anger causes us to make changes, and signals that there is a problem.

But anger that leads to sin, anger that isn't dealt with, doesn't have a place.

Paul warns that anger that isn't dealt with gives the devil a foothold to destroy the community.

I have been part of teams that have gone into different churches when there have been problems, and I have heard of years of unresolved anger and conflict.

The devil was given more than a foothold, and the community was undone by it.

Thieves, people who stole, or people who made a living in dishonest ways, not only were they to get an honest job, and stop stealing, they were to work so help those in need.

We are to be a community that works, not just for ourselves and our own needs, but we work so we can help those who can't.

We work to bless others.

When Paul gets to talking about how we speak, he uses the same kind of parallel construction.

It's not just that no foul words, or obscene talk is supposed to come from our mouths, but our words are to bless, to help those in need.

Has someone ever made your day just by the kind words they spoke to you? Have you ever received a word of encouragement, or hope, or a compliment, or a thank you, and it helped so much?

Paul tells us that here, in this new community of the kingdom of God, not only do we speak the truth, and we don't speak lude, crude, hurtful words, but here we speak words that help the poor in spirit, and those who need to be lifted up.

Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift.

³⁰ Don't grieve God. Don't break his heart. His Holy Spirit, moving and breathing in you, is the most intimate part of your life, making you fit for himself. Don't take such a gift for granted.

³¹⁻³² Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you.

The Holy Spirit dwells in believers.

The Spirit of the Almighty God dwells in this community that is named as Jesus' own.

Don't take that gift for granted.

Don't live or act in a way that is going to grieve the Spirit of God.

Be gentle with one another, sensitive.

Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you.

This is the community that we are called to be, that Jesus is forming us to be.

It happens as we take off the old life, and we put on Christ.

It happens as we pray, and fix our eyes on God, and we learn new ways.

And we get dressed in the new ways of Jesus.

Paul isn't a dreamer, neither was Jesus.
It's not easy to be this new community of Jesus' people.
So Paul reminds us how do this:

*Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. **Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us.** His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.*

Keep company with God, observe, reflect, contemplate how Jesus the Messiah loved us, and the extravagance of his love for us.

Jesus loved us not in order to get anything from us, but he loves us so extravagantly that we can live in that love, and we can learn to love, and be a community where all of us flourish in that love.

And when we fail, we are forgiven, and we learn again to forgive each other, and again we put on the love of Jesus, fixing our eyes on God, keeping company with him.

And when we do that, we are changed, and we become more Christ-like together, and we flourish as God's redeemed, forgiven people, a new community in Christ.

Thanks be to God.