

PILGRIM C H U R C H

An open and affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ

BE KIND, TENDERHEARTED, FORGIVING

Ephesians 4:25 – 5:2 August 9, 2009

Pilgrim Bud Precise

How does a community order life? Groups have different priorities about how they will live together. While we are not Amish, there is much about the life style of that group that appeals to us – a simpler way of living, emphasis on community life rather than distractions of the modern world. And we applaud their willingness to forgive and not seek revenge.

THE FIRST PAUL by Borg and Crossan identifies the difference in how Rome orders life and how Paul sees the way of the Christina Life. Rome makes sense of the world RELIGION >> VIOLENCE (war) > VICTORY> PEACE. Paul makes sense of life RELIGION >NON-VIOLENCE > JUSTICE > PEACE.

Our text in Paul's letter to the Ephesians for today follows a discussion of what it means to be the Body of

Christ. Paul is trying to make some sense of how the community of faith can live together. He is aware that the world will judge a community by how it orders its life together. Paul has made a strong statement

to the Ephesians that they are "members one of another." He asks them to give up life that does not build

up the community of faith. He actually insists that they must no longer live as the Gentiles. By that, he is speaking of a way of living that is self-centered, a way of living that is not honest, a way of living that is not thoughtful of others.

Today's lection provides a list of ethical instructions. They deal with everyday, ordinary matters. But we need to understand that they are not trivial. That everyday living may be the most difficult part of being Christian. We become accustomed to routine. We sometimes forget to take care of daily details. And before long, we find ourselves wondering what went wrong. I do believe that we do well with the big issues (decisions) of our lives – career, marriage partner, birth or adoption of children. We do well with those because we know they need planning, they need our attention.

Many relations are broken because of the failure to take care of everyday needs – inclusion, respect, understanding. Many a football game is lost – not because of big plays, but because a team fails in the basics of the game – tackling, blocking – common tasks worked on every day.

Paul's list for the Ephesians begins with a community value as common and old as the Ten Commandments. Put away falsehood. You can't bear false witness against a neighbor. Why? We are Members One of Another. Lying will destroy our trust in each other. It will destroy our community.

"Be angry, but do not sin." This value too has an Old Testament basis. Jesus insisted that anger was equal

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to murder- for at the bottom of both is active ill will. James cautions the community to “be slow to anger.”

The text recognizes that we don’t act at our best intentions when we are angry. Actually, there is a technical matter here with the Greek. In the written and spoken Greek of that day, the imperative mood (used here) expresses not only a command – Don’t be Angry - but it includes a concession. So the meaning is: You may be angry – if you can’t help it, but do not let that anger cause you to forget who you are. Don’t be so angry that it becomes an obsession and you lose your perspective on how to act.

“Thieves must give up stealing.” It’s like that is how some of the members of the community made their living. You can’t do that – it goes back to the commandments. It doesn’t matter if your name is Madoff, if you are on the city council, or if you just shop life – don’t do that. It will destroy community and it will destroy you. And we need to watch our words. Words have stolen a lot of people’s good character.

My favorite verse in the whole bible is in this text for today. “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.” Our society doesn’t place much value on tenderhearted, does it? Tenderhearted – easily aroused to pity, sorrow. I think that a lot of people view tenderhearted as a sign of weakness. Our society places emphasis on being tough, self-sufficient, taking care of yourself.

We all experience the need to be forgiven – for hastily spoken words, deeds done in anger, for being self-centered.

I am struck by many the many deeds of kindness we witness everyday. I hope you notice them and make reference to them and thank the person doing the good deed. We need to make more of them than we do.

At our last Youthserve camp, I was helping Latonya and Darius collect all the coolers we had used to take food and drink to Kelly Ingram Park for our lunch. We also bagged u the different games, balls, markers – things we had used in our group building games. We were driving these to the YWCA - then on to meet the campers and rest of the staff at the Peanut Depot on Morris Avenue. Driving down the street, downtown Birmingham, Latonya noticed a kid on a scooter drop something. We got closer. It was his cell phone. Darius got out of the car, but the kid had disappeared around the corner. We drove around the block – complicated by one way streets and finally spotted the kid. Darius got out to try to catch him. We lost sight of Darius and the kid. Finally about 5 minutes later, we say Darius. He had found the kin in the lobby of the bank and given him his phone back. I know that is not a life changing event. But it is a common event in everyday life. It is an act of kindness. It is how we behave in this community of faith that we call Christian. Paul says we need a new heart, one that is tender, one that produces love.