

Text: Eph 4:30 – 5:2

Date: August 27, 2006

Pentecost 12B

Live a Life of Love

Intro: New Year's Resolutions, turning over a new leaf, fad diets. How many of us here have tried and failed to change something? It may be something small and insignificant, or it may be quitting smoking or something bigger. Resolutions are easily broken, usually by the end of January. Leaves don't stay turned over very long, either. Fads fade out.

But how many of us have tried to change our entire way of life? Have you ever done that? A significant change, a complete 180. Changing the direction of your schooling or career, your life, your way of thinking. This seems like a huge undertaking, but every one of us has gone through a life-altering change. At one time, we were enemies of God. **“The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.”** (Rom. 8:7)

Whether it was when we were babies, or sometime later in life, we went from being far away from God to being brought near, through the Word and the waters of baptism. Through faith, you are now a dearly loved child of God. That is a complete transformation, and a different way of life.

Today we will hear about this transformation, and the change that comes with it. Today we are told: **Live a life of Love: Leave the ways of the World, Love as Christ Loved You.**

Leave the Ways of the World

The portion of Scripture for our instruction today comes from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. This letter was not intended to fix a specific problem, like many of Paul's other letters, but to encourage the believers there, whom he had served as their pastor. Paul had stayed in Ephesus for 3 years building up the Christian church and instructing the people.

Ephesus was a wealthy, strategic city in Asia Minor. The streets were paved with white marble, there was a huge theater, and the temple to the goddess Artemis, with 300 temple prostitutes who were part of the rituals performed there. Ephesian culture was pagan and wealthy. People were promiscuous, and proud of it. They loved to take part in the excesses that their wealth afforded them. They were part of the most powerful empire in the world, and they were limited only by their imaginations.

That doesn't sound too foreign, does it? There are many similarities between ancient Ephesus and modern-day America. Everywhere you look you see people flaunting their wealth, making material things their god. Huge houses, expensive cars, luxurious yachts – things that are blessings in and of themselves, but many people love these things more than God. People are even proud of their promiscuity, and they scream out loud things that are shameful to hear about in secret. Movies, TV shows, and culture in general showcase the same things as Ephesus. Paul was writing to a group of Christians who faced constant temptation to go back to a pagan way of life, with its sinful actions and wicked ideals.

In our section for today, Paul writes about behavior and our outward interactions with others. Paul writes, **“30 do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.”**

That doesn't sound so hard, does it? Don't be bitter and angry. Cut out the foul language. Don't fly off the handle. Okay. I can do that, right? That's easier said than done though, isn't it?

Sure it seems easy right now, sitting in church, but when does this get tough? After a bad day, when your patience is gone, when something gets under your skin and pushes the wrong button. Someone embarrasses you in front of other people, does something mean and underhanded. Someone ruined your reputation, or cheated you in a business dealing.

What really gets to you? What button fires off your temper, raises the blood pressure, and releases a torrent of blazing emotion that blisters everything in its path? When emotions run high, during an argument, or in the face of insults, that's when the chain that holds back that dog is really strained.

This goes deeper than just spoken words. You see, words are the fruit on the tree. Outward behavior is evidence of what's inside. In Matthew 12:34, Jesus says **“Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.”** So Paul points at those actions, but the real issue is what's in your heart: anger and bitterness, sin lurking around every corner. This kind of heart deserves nothing good from God. By nature, this is your heart. Your Old Adam still fights to be counted among the world.

Transition: **“You, however, did not come to know Christ that way”** (vs. 20). Instead of being bitter and angry with our neighbor like our sinful nature wants, Paul directs us to make a complete break with this pagan behavior, and **leave the ways of the world**. It is only through Christ that we are able to leave those things behind. Through Christ you can **Live a Life of Love; Love as Christ Loved You**.

Love as Christ Loved You

Throughout his letter to the Ephesians, Paul draws a sharp distinction between the way we used to be with the way we are. **You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord** (5:8). At one time, your life was characterized by anger, hatred, and other fruits of unbelief. That was our life before conversion, before we knew Christ. But now. Now things are completely different.

The love of Jesus makes all the difference in our lives. It was love that caused Jesus to take on human flesh. In love, Jesus followed God's Law perfectly: he never lied, never said words meant to hurt someone. Everything Jesus did was motivated by love. He was patient with his slow-learning disciples. He upheld the reputation of others, even stopping a murderous mob about to stone a woman. Out of love, he did what was best for every person he met.

But it was at the end of his perfect life that Jesus did what was best for every person that ever lived. Even though he had never sinned, Jesus paid the punishment for your anger, my bitterness. He exchanged his perfection for our sin. He took the punishment we deserved, and gave us the eternal life that he earned with his perfect life and innocent death. In love, Christ lived for you, and he died for you. And then God put his stamp of approval on that sacrifice. Jesus was not abandoned to the grave, but rose as the firstborn from the dead. And Jesus says that you too will rise one day, to live forever with your Father in Heaven. This is the end and goal of our faith.

So what now? What do we do with the rest of our life here on earth? Paul now encourages the Ephesian Christians, and us, to live with a different focus. **32 “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”**

There are two relationships that are being talked about here. Our relationship with God, and our relationship with our fellow human beings. Through the life and death of Christ, our relationship with God the Father has been reestablished. We who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. Now we know what love is, because we have been shown

love. 1 John 4:19 says, **“We love because he first loved us.”** Our love for others results from Jesus’ love for us.

Through the Holy Spirit, the love of Jesus works a change in our hearts and lives. By grace, our Lord empowers us to love others. **“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”** It is more than inspiration, or providing an example. In a real way, God’s love is the source of our love.

Have you ever seen a child imitating his father? Pushing a toy lawn mower, or banging away on a plastic tool bench. Children often mimic the example that their parents provide. The love that our Father showed us through Christ shows us what real love is. Think of 1 Cor. 13 – the great love chapter of the Bible.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (1 Cor. 13: 1-7)

This chapter tells us all about Christian and Christ-like love that believers have for one another, not just married couples. This section talks about living a life of love with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul says, be imitators of God. Do to others as God has done to you. Forgive one another, just like Christ forgave you. In other words, let love characterize your life. Everything we do is about love. Love for God our Father, and love for our brothers and sisters in the faith.

This is not a resolution, or a fad that will go out of style. This is our new life in Christ. **Live a life of Love. Leave the ways of the World, and Love as Christ loved you. Amen.**