

Trinity 11 B
12.8.18

Forest 11am
St Stephen's 9.30

Eph 4: 25 - 5:2

“So, then, putting away any falsehood let us speak truth to our neighbours, for we are members one of another ----- let 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.” (vv25 & 29)

How many of us read the Bible every day? Many of us do read a short passage, but not many of us will read a whole gospel or letter or a prophet from the OT at one or two sittings to get a flavour of the author's argument. Such a reading could link different aspects of faith which would deepen our understanding.

St Paul's letter to the Ephesians is a case in point. We tend to hear different passages read as the Sunday Epistle, but probably have no clear view of the flow of St Paul's argument. Thus the first part of the Epistle explains how the Church fits in to God's overall plan of salvation.

In Chapter one, St Paul has a grand vision of the love of God in the context of the whole of space and time, and focuses God's loving purpose on the Church. At the centre of God's purpose is the costly death of Jesus, which opens the grace of God to his people, and then to involve the whole of creation under the headship of Christ. Christians are called to live in this light, in a way that reflects God's love in a pagan world, sustained by the Holy Spirit.

The effect of the Cross is to break down the divisions between Jew and Gentile, and has brought unity where before there was only antagonism. But this new life goes further; it creates a new community bound together in God's love. So we are to work to break down the cultural and social barriers within the Church, and seek to bring the same about in the world. The first half of the letter ends in praise to God, praying that the Ephesians may be grounded and rooted in Christ's love, and reminding them that God is able to do far

more than we can ever imagine, working in us to bring about his purposes.

So we come to chapter 4, the source of today's Epistle. Having set out in the earlier chapters how the Church fits in to God's overall plan of salvation, St Paul now stresses the unity of the Church, calling on Christians to live a new life, putting off their old self, guided now by the principles of the Kingdom. St Paul then gives some practical instructions as to what this means.

How, he asks, can the unity and love, which should mark the life of the Church, be maintained? Well, he says, lying, unjustified anger and stealing all undermine the fellowship of the church. These are everyday sins, which we all have to grapple with. Unity and love have to be realised in our daily relationships. And then St Paul emphasizes the importance of what we say.

It was the author to Ecclesiastes who wrote: "Of the writing of books there is no end." And in our day we are inundated with words, not only through the Press, radio and TV, but with Twitter and Facebook and the other electronic means of communication. And much of what is said and written is mere speculation or outrageous bombast.

In recent years we have what has been called the 'tyranny of the tabloids' – politicians paying more attention to what the papers are saying, than they do to what situations properly demand. This is nothing new. The late Lord Beaverbrook, then owner of the Daily Express, in a conversation with Rudyard Kipling, is reported to have said: "What I want is power. Kiss 'em one day and kick 'em the next." To which Kipling made his famous comment: "Power without responsibility, the prerogative of the harlot throughout the ages."

This rightly sums up the attitude of many of the tabloids, which preach righteousness whilst exploiting people's base emotions for profit. Newspaper editors and

Twitter users could well ponder the story of the woman who like to gossip about her neighbours. One day, something she said caused a great deal of trouble for one.

The woman went to the priest to confess, full of remorse. As a penance, she was told to go to market, buy two dead hens and pluck them as she walked home. When she'd done this she went back to the priest as instructed. "Now," he said, "one more thing remains. Go back and gather all the feathers.!"

St James reminds us that if we have no control of our tongue, or our writing, we have no claim to righteousness. What we say and write matters. It can build up or tear down. As members of the Church we are to do all we can to seek unity and peace between us. As St Paul says: "We are members, one of another.' We are called on to speak the truth, but in such a way that unity can be restored or maintained.

It is often said that actions speak louder than words, which many of us use as an excuse not to speak of the gospel. It is true that if what we say doesn't agree with how we behave, it is a damning indictment on our faith. But words, which have their proof in our actions, are a powerful force in fulfilling our calling as Christians.

Okinawa was captured by American troops at the end of WW2, and in the report of those events, the island was stated to be in a state of moral collapse. As the troops advanced cautiously into the island, they came across a village, where they were greeted by two elderly men, one of whom was carrying a Bible. The Soldiers feared a trap, but they found everything in good order, the fields tilled and fertile, the whole village well ordered and hygienic, in contrast to the rest of the island. One of the old men explained the reason.

Some thirty years earlier, an American missionary had stopped by for a few days on his way to Tokyo. Whilst

there, he managed to convert these two old men, teaching them a few hymns and prayers, and leaving a Bible, telling them to model their lives on what they found there. This they had done, and it had transformed their community. There was no jail, no brothel, no drunkenness and no divorce.

As the reporter who brought the story to light said: "So this is what comes out of only a Bible and a couple of old men who want to live like Jesus. Maybe we're using the wrong type of weapons to change the world."

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