

An expression of profound faith!

Ephesians 4:25 -5:2 Do not let the sun go down on your anger

Psalm 130 – Out of the depths I cry to God

So, let me start by asking you this; how many times in your life have you tried to get your life back on track? And, how many times of those times did you think that the best way to do this was to change your diet? How many times have you promised yourself to get back to the gym or to exercise more and go for a walk and enjoy nature? It amazes me when I think about how many self-help books there are, tv shows, makeover shows that are on tv like DIY for your home. There's the bar and restaurant makeover rescues. There're the shows like Biggest Loser. There are boot camps for teens who don't respect their parents and need a little more discipline. There are fashion channels, makeup shows, hair shows; it goes on and on and on. Now, I ask you, where is the spiritual makeover tv show? Can you imagine a show that looked at your spiritual life everyday and then brought in a spiritual expert or guru? A holy person to examine how you are living your spiritual life and they asked you about what you were doing and what changes you might make so that if you lived your life spiritually you would be open to the transformation, the promise and the hope that is offered by being a person of faith. A guru who would help you figure out how to be spiritually connected and fulfilled so that you no longer felt hungry or spiritually empty. The audience might be given glimpses into your relationships and your daily activities. The producers might even go so far as to delve into what our spiritual practices are or aren't. Like all shows they would probably also just get so excited to look in our closets and see all the hidden things in our lives that we don't want to acknowledge. Those are the spaces I think Paul was referring to as the space where the Devil was able to be. Now lucky for us, we don't need a tv show; we have worship services every week, where we can reflect on our week, to learn new practices, and to refocus our lives so that throughout the week we are living spiritually.

In the scripture today, Paul is not speaking to the unchurched. He is speaking to the followers of Christ. The people who have chosen to follow in Christ's footsteps. And in the scripture from Ephesians, he reminds the followers that we are called by God to do the following things: to take off our protective armour of anger, bitterness and wrath, slander and malice and instead we're invited and asked to imitate God, to imitate Christ and that means that we are being asked to cloak ourselves in kindness, tender heartedness, forgiveness and truth telling. Our spirits are a

part of who we are and if we are to seek wholeness and health and wellness in our lives we need to put as much effort into our spiritual lives as we do our physical and our mental health.

So, what would a spiritual makeover look like? What spiritual behaviours do we need to change? How do we live into holiness and how do we imitate God? How do we become Christians and live Christian lives? The easy line is to say, ‘They will know we are Christian by our love.’ But let’s begin with Paul’s instructions. He starts by saying be angry, but do not sin. I think this is one of the biggest stumbling blocks we have as Christians. We have somehow come to believe that we as Christians, we’re always to be sweet and pleasant, we never get angry, because we are a peaceful people, but this isn’t accurate. Let’s be serious, even Jesus got angry. He threw over the tables. He was pissed off. Anger is defined by John Monbourquette as a “state of inner irritability caused by some annoyance, insult or injury.”¹

In and of itself anger, according to Paul is fine. So, people, get angry, get passionate, but then he goes on to explain that we should not let the sun go down on this anger. Anger can quickly turn to hatred and resentment; and resentment can root itself in the human heart. Anger should not be allowed to fester within us, nor should it be worn as a badge of honour or a coat of protection. Repressed anger has a habit of being taken out on the people we love the most. Repressed anger is most often lived out in forms of blaming and nagging and cynicism, accusing hostility, even sulking. Paul is very clear that we need to put away all bitterness, wrath, slander, and malice. So how do we do this? We could take notes from our Psalmist today who cries out to God from the depths of his pain and sorrow. I want to be clear that crying out to God in lament is not the same as simply complaining. Stephen Farris, a preacher in the Presbyterian church explains this.

“The Psalmist cries out to God; what makes the Psalm remarkable is that in pain the Psalmist addresses God. In complaint one grumbles about God, but in lament, one cries out to God. That kind of cry is an expression of profound faith, a faith that says God is present and that God hears us, and that God is able and willing to act in our lives.”²

Be angry, but don’t hold onto it. Cry out to God and experience hope, keep crying out to God for it is a profound expression of faith. It’s a sign of trust. I don’t know if you notice, but if you listen to the Psalm, the Psalmist doesn’t linger that long in pain and suffering. In fact, both readings today are filled with hope. Even though they begin from that place of pain and longing by the end they are encouraged. They receive the promise of steadfast love. Now all too often when we are in pain and suffering we isolate ourselves from our church family, we turn away from God. Just like diet and exercise, we know what we should do and yet we often do the opposite.

¹ John Monbourquette, *How to Forgive; A Step-by-Step Guide*, (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2000), p. 108.

² Stephen Farris, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 2, p. 131.

So, how can we stop making room for the Devil to lead us down the paths that are harmful to us and others? We can do this by reaching out instead to God for hope and reaching out to others in our midst for support and encouragement. Being Christian is a commitment to living in community with all people, with all creation and with God. So here are some spiritual practices that Paul suggests that we need to be engaged in. And he starts with that we need to be truthful, for without truth authentic community fails. As I said, God has called us into relationship with one another and when we are able to be truthful about what we are dealing with, what we are feeling about some of our struggles in life and some of our joys we are able to be open and vulnerable with one another, and only then, can another be there for us, to witness with us, to walk with us and to support us in both our joys and our sorrows.

I was at a national meeting of the church back in 2006 in Thunder Bay and I witnessed this vulnerability and this connectedness that happened in a moment that you wouldn't have expected. There were 600 people sitting on the floor in an arena, debating important documents in the church and arguing over our Statement of Faith; whether it's "A Statement of Faith" or "The Statement of Faith" or something else. It's always something small; it's what we do. One youth stood up in a time of silence; we had decided that we would discern where the spirit was calling us, and this one youth stood up in the middle of 600 people and started to sing. I am one voice, I am singing, I am not alone. She sang it again, but this time, someone else joined her; We are two voices, We are singing, We are not alone. And then three more people stood up. Next thing you knew the entire floor was standing and singing We are one voice, We are singing, we are not alone. And, as they sang they moved to the edges of the arena, held hands and prayed together. After that moment, the Spirit calmed the fears of the people. The bickering and the complaining finally stopped and we were finally able to focus on what God was calling us to be and do as a community of faith. And it was powerful, and it was something that has stayed with me for a long time.

When we can be truthful, open and honest with each other our hearts can be kind and tender-hearted, which is the second thing that Paul has asked us to do. We are to be kind and tender-hearted. We need to practice kindness friends. It is easy to complain and yell at each other. We need to practice being kind. For when we are kind we can break down the most hardened of hearts opening them up in a way that is vulnerable, honest and loving. We are also called to be forgiving and to offer one another grace, knowing that none of us are perfect.

And then this next part. We are to give up thievery. I don't know that any of you feels that you are a thief but, according to Paul we have all engaged in this and what he means by this is that when we make decisions in our lives about what we are going to do that we should not make the decision based on personal gain, but rather how we can share with the community in which we live. Our decisions should be made on how we can help others and by doing that we commit and fully participate in community. We are called to be part of a community where everyone contributes, and everyone helps and plays their part. Pitch in, in what ever way you can. What I have always loved about faith communities is those moments where people come together, and

things happen; in emergencies, daily routines. I love Sunday's where suddenly people are stacking chairs and cleaning tables and caring for one another, listening to stories, encouraging one another by phoning them up and saying, 'I missed you, I wished you were here.' I have seen it in the people who welcome somebody new. Not in the way like the vampires do by trying to suck the blood out of them, but really inviting them to be part of who we are without expectation.

This is what it means to be part of community and when we do that we will be filled with joy and we will be transformed, and our hearts will be opened, and this world will be the peaceful place that Jesus has provided for us, that God has called us to live in. This has been a hard week as we have lost many people that we love and care for, but I know and trust that we will care for each other in these moments and we will hold onto hope as we cry out from the depths to God, knowing that we are not alone. And for this we give God thanks, Amen.