

LIVE A LIFE OF LOVE

August 23, 2009

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Old Testament Lesson; 1 Kings 19:3-8

Gospel Lesson; John 6:41-51

Sermon Text; Ephesians 4:30 – 5:2

The text, or Bible passage that we will look at today, is taken from the Epistle, or letter, to the Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 30 through chapter 5, verse 2.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 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.

These are Your Words, Heavenly Father. Lead us in the way of truth. Your Word is truth.

Amen

Maybe you heard about the lady who was driving her car, and noticed in her rear view mirror that there was a policeman following her. So, she was very careful how she was driving. As she came to an intersection, she saw that she had a green light, so she carefully started through the intersection. All of a sudden, another car came

careening through the other part of the intersection, on their RED light! That car just about hit this lady's car. She slammed on her brakes, and just avoided having an accident! Her heart beat went up. She started yelling, "You blank-ity, blank!!!" She was shaking her fists, and then, started making obscene gestures.

Finally, she calmed down and looked in her rear view mirror. The policeman was still back there. She thought, "Oh good! That policeman saw the whole thing and he is going to stop the car that just about hit me!"

She continued on, and all of a sudden the police car's lights went on. She thought the police car was going to chase the person who went through the red light, but instead the police car followed her, with the lights flashing! She could see the policeman pointing to her to go to the side of the road. So, she pulled over to the side of the road. Now she was upset, again, because the policeman was not stopping the person who had gone through the red light.

The policeman could see she was angry, because she was shaking her fist, and saying something. And, when he came to the window, she asked him, "**Why didn't you stop that blank-ity, blank? He just about hit me and here you are talking to me.**"

The policeman said to her, "Calm down. **Calm down!**" And then, he put his hand on his gun and said, "I want you to step out of the car."

She yelled, "**What!**"

He said, "I want you to step out of the car. I have reason to believe that you are driving a stolen car."

Now she was quite mad, but because his hand was on the gun, she got out of the car. And she asked him, "What do you mean I am driving a stolen car? This is my car."

He said to her, "I want you to come back here, with me." So, they went to the back of the car and he told her, "Look at the bumper sticker there. That one says, '*Jesus saves.*' That one says, '*God is*

love.' That one says, *'I am a Christian.'* I have been watching you and I know this can't be your car."

Her actions were quite different from the person she claimed to be. The policeman was pointing that out to her.

What if that car had a bumper sticker that said, "***Holy Cross Lutheran Church***" on it? That would have brought a little grief to us, here at Holy Cross, if one of us had acted that way, wouldn't it? Our Bible passage today says,

"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,
with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

We have a mark on us, as it were. That mark is not a bumper sticker on a car. You have been marked, or sealed, by the Holy Spirit.

When you were baptized, God publicly put His sign on you. He put His seal on you, and He said, "*You are mine. You belong to Christ. Your sins have been paid for. You have been redeemed. You have all of the promises of God. You are called out of the darkness of this world into the light of salvation. You are alive in Christ. You have been justified. You have been called to live a sanctified life. You have been marked with the Holy Spirit.*"

The Bible says,

"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God."

In other words it is saying, "*Don't live in a way that is contrary to what the Holy Spirit has done for you and called you to.*"

In today's scripture reading, it falls in a section of scripture where it particularly tells us, as Christians, to be very careful how we deal with the whole issue of anger. Don't grieve the Holy Spirit of God by the way you deal with anger. This section of scripture wraps up a section where God, through Paul, talks about anger. Anger is not, in and of itself, necessarily a sin. We know that God gets angry, so anger cannot always be a sin. **Anger, technically, is a powerful emotion of displeasure when some injustice is done.** It could be a powerful emotion of displeasure, if someone blasphemes or makes

fun of your Savior. That is righteous anger. It could be a powerful emotion of displeasure, if someone picks on your husband, your wife, or your children. That can be a righteous anger. The Bible says,

“In your anger,
do not sin.”

We can be angry, but we have to be careful that we don't sin, or act in a way that brings grief to the Holy Spirit, in the way we deal with our anger. And so, today's scripture reading points out ways in which we, as God's people, could act in a way that is unbecoming to someone who is a believer in Christ, as their Savior. It would bring grief to the Holy Spirit, by the way we deal with the whole issue of anger. Our scripture reading says,

“Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger,
brawling and slander.”

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger. When someone does something to you that causes those powerful emotions of displeasure to arise in your heart, how do you react? Our passage goes on and says that we should get rid of “every form of malice”. Malice is what happens in our heart. Malice is a feeling of ill-will, and desire that something bad would happen to somebody, or some evil would happen to someone. It is ill-will toward someone. And so, when someone, (whether it be your boss, or a coworker, or a spouse, or your child, or your parents, or your neighbor) does something that causes an immediate reaction of displeasure in your heart, how do you react to it? Do you react in a way that brings grief to the Holy Spirit?

The Bible says,

“**Get rid of all bitterness...**”

Bitterness is that resentment in your heart, against someone. Now, that is unbecoming of a child of God. Here's why. Have you wronged God? We wrong God every, every day. In deep and

profound ways, each one of us has wronged God. Does God harbor bitterness in His heart against you? He does not.

For the sake of Christ your Savior,
He has set aside anger, bitterness, and rage against you.

And, He forgives you, for Christ's sake.

Knowing that, it is unbecoming of a child of God, someone who has been sealed by the Holy Spirit, to harbor in their heart bitterness, feelings of resentment, and contempt. *“I don't like that guy. I wish he would get hurt. I wish something bad would happen to him. I can't stand him. I would like to wring his neck.”* Those are sins that grieve the Holy Spirit of God. It is acting in a way that is unbecoming of someone who has been sealed by the Holy Spirit of God. Jesus said,

“You have heard it said, 'You shall not murder.'

I tell you

anyone who hates his brother
is a murderer.”

So, it grieves the Holy Spirit, when we, who have been forgiven by God, (for whom God holds no resentment), when we hold bitterness or resentment in our heart toward those who sin against us.

The Bible also tells us here, to get rid of all “brawling and slander”. It is not just what happens in the heart. That can certainly be a sin against God and grieve the Holy Spirit, but it is what comes out of the mouth that can certainly be unbecoming of someone who has been called by the Holy Spirit of God to be a child of God. Think of the things that can come out a person's mouth in a moment of anger, unguarded anger. You have heard it said, “Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” That is not true. Words can hurt a lot worse than sticks or stones could ever hurt. And, it is unbecoming of a child of God, when we sin against God. You sin against Him, just like I do, daily. Does God come at us with words intended to tear us apart? No. He comes to us and says,

“Be of good cheer.
Your sins are forgiven.”

He says,

“Comfort, comfort, my people.
Tell her that her sins have been paid for.”

He comes to us with words of comfort and forgiveness, when we sin against Him. And, how unbecoming it is of a child of God, when in anger, we say things that are mean, hurtful, and harmful, when someone sins against us . That is a sin against God, and it grieves the Holy Spirit. Our scripture passage here says,

“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,
with whom you were sealed for the day of the redemption.
Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger,
brawling and slander,
along with every form of malice.”

How do we get rid of that bitterness that can be in our hearts? And, there is not a person, here in this room, who can say, “*Not me.*” We all struggle sometimes with bitterness against people, don't we? We do. We struggle with rage in our hearts, sometimes. We struggle. We wish we could take back words we said, but they have gone out of our mouth. How do we get rid of that behavior, when we have a sinful nature, and we don't have the power to overcome that behavior on our own? It can only be gotten rid of in one way.
•It can only be gotten rid of by being born again.
•It can only be gotten rid of by becoming a new person.
•It can only be gotten rid of by becoming a different person, in Christ.

God calls us to repentance of our sin. But, I want to ask you a question. Does God forgive us, because we repent? Or, do we repent, because we are forgiven? When did God forgive you? When did God forgive you? It was way before you ever repented of your sin. It was way before you ever even thought of repenting for

your sin. It was even way before you were ever born! When did God forgive you? The Bible says,

“While we were still sinners,
Christ died for us.”

Christ died on the cross, to wash away all of your sins, before you and I ever even thought of repenting for our sins. What an awesome, loving and gracious God we have! Why is it that we repent of our sins? We repent, because we are forgiven and we long to have that forgiveness in Christ. We cling to it. Through that repentance, through that faith that the Holy Spirit works in Christ as our Savior, the Holy Spirit brings us new life, to know that I am forgiven.

I am forgiven!

I stand forgiven, because of what Christ has done for me on the cross. That brings us new life. It is like somebody's heart has stopped beating and those patches are put on them, those AED patches. A shock is administered, and that person comes to life. They did not bring themselves to life. It is the Holy Spirit, who through the Gospel, that sweet Gospel message of forgiveness, brings us to life! He gives us new hands, new ears, new eyes, and new mouth that wants to serve our Savior.

Anyone who truly believes in Jesus, as their Savior, can't get out of their vision the cross of Christ, can't get out of their vision, that Man hanging on the cross, bruised, bloodied, and beaten. And who is it that hangs on the cross? It is the Son of God. And why is it that He is hanging there? He is hanging there to pay for all of my sins. And, how do I know? Because the Bible says that He paid for the sins of the world...and that means He paid for my sins! How can I get that vision out of my mind that God has died for me?

By the same token, that means that I am not the only one He died for. The One who hangs there on the cross died for all. The Bible says,

“He died for the sins of the whole world.”

He died for all. Why did He die for all? He died for all, because He loves all.

So, how can I withhold my love from those for whom Christ died? How could I harbor bitterness in my heart for those to whom Christ harbors no bitterness? How can I withhold forgiveness from those whom Christ has freely died to forgive? And so, here scripture says,

“Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling, and slander.”

And instead it says,

**“Be kind and compassionate to one another,
forgiving each other,
just as in Christ God forgave you.”**

You know the parable that Jesus told of the unforgiving servant.

There was a servant who owed his master. (I will put it in modern day terms, and say he owed his master a million dollars.)

The master called him into the office and said, “You owe me a million dollars. Pay it.”

The man said, “I don't have the money, I can't pay it. Give me some time.”

The master, in his mercy and kindness, said to that servant, “I forgive all your debt. You don't owe me a penny! You are free of your debt. You are forgiven.”

That man walked out of that master's office, forgiven of a debt of a million dollars! Then, he walked up to somebody who owed him ten bucks. He grabbed him by the throat and said, “You owe me ten dollars. Give it back to me.”

The man said, “I can't pay it back. Give me some time.”

So the servant was so mad that he called the police and had the man who owed him ten dollars thrown in jail.

When the master heard about that, he called that man back in and said, “You wicked servant. I forgave you that great debt and this is how you treat someone who has a little debt against you?”

We have been forgiven a great, great, **great debt**. And it is becoming of us, as God's people, to forgive. We pray in the Lord's Prayer, which Christ taught us to pray,

“Forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Let's not harbor in our hearts resentment, bitterness, and rage toward others, but a heart of love and forgiveness in Christ, and for Christ's sake.

What did Jesus say, when Jesus was dying on the cross, and all of those people were standing around the cross, throwing all kinds of anger, resentment, rage, and bitterness His way? What did He say? He said, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Isn't it stunning? What a pleasing aroma, as our Bible passage says,

“Christ loved us
and gave Himself up for us,
a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

I love that picture! Do you ever walk into your home and smell a fragrant aroma? Maybe it is cookies baking in the oven. Or, maybe it is a steak cooking on the grill. It is that aroma that just makes you want to be there. You want to be around it. And, when Christ said, “Father forgive them” that just causes us to want to be around Christ, be with Him, and have our sins forgiven, for Christ's sake. You know about Stephen, who was the first martyr to die a Christian in the New Testament. He died for his faith in Christ. What did he say, when the stones were hitting his body? He imitated Jesus. He became an imitator of Christ. As those stones were hitting his body, he said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And then he said, “Do not hold this sin against them.”

What a pleasant aroma of forgiveness! When we live our lives like that, what a witness it is to those around us. We are different people. We are changed people. We are people who don't hold in our hearts resentment, bitterness, and rage. And when we do, we certainly

repent, turn to Christ, and we know that we are forgiven. That causes people to want to be around you, to be with you, and gives you an opportunity to witness your faith in a forgiving Savior!
Amen