

“Be Kind To One Another”

**First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson
September 17, 2017**

Old Testament lesson: Psalm 143

New Testament lesson: Ephesians 4;25-32

When Boston Red Sox player Wade Boggs played third base at Yankee Stadium, one of the Yankee fans made it a personal mission to harass him. The man had a box seat close to the field and would torment Boggs with obscenities and insults for the duration of every game. Finally, Boggs decided he'd had enough.

At the next game as the man began his typical insult routine, Wade walked directly over to him and asked, “Are you the guy who’s always yelling at me?” “Yeah, it’s me. Whatcha gonna do about it?” responded the man. And with that, Wade took a baseball out of his pocket, autographed it, tossed it to the man. He became one of Wade’s biggest fans at Yankee Stadium.

“Be angry, but do not sin,” says Ephesians. Wade Boggs was angry at that belligerent fan, but he did not let that cause him to return anger for anger. Instead, he met anger with kindness, and got kindness in return. Wow! What a simple lesson. And yet how often do we fall into the anger trap, letting our emotions lead the way rather than following basic, Christian teachings?

Today’s New Testament lesson contains four basic, Christian teachings-teachings that, if followed, would save us from a world of hurt, and actually save the world from a downward spiral.

The first basic teaching is that God is truth. We see that where Ephesians says we should, “... Speak the truth to our neighbors...” and we see it where Jesus says in the Gospel According to John, “... You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” I am the way and the truth and the life” God’s truth. Contrast this with what Pontius Pilate said before handing Jesus over to be crucified. He said, “What is truth?”

Jesus says, “I came to testify to the truth,” and Pilate replies, “What is truth?” Had Pilate know truth – resisted evil – who knows how it would have gone. One thing that is for sure though, is that God is truth, *and* we are not.

That’s the second basic, Christian teaching from today’s scripture lesson: We are not, in and of ourselves, prone to the truth. Ever since we lied to God about biting that apple in the Garden of Eden just because we could, we have been more prone to covering our own butts – literally if you think about fig leaves – covering our own butts, rather than telling and living into the truth that gives rise to basic, Christian teachings. The truth is, we have to work at being good Christians; it does not come naturally.

What does come naturally is anger and sin. That's why Ephesians says, "Be angry, but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil." We will get angry from time to time. But we are not to live in anger, for that leads to sin.

It's like the mother who was driving with her young daughter. Traffic was heavy, the weather was terrible, and mom got just a bit frazzled. So she began pointing out all the flaws of the other drivers, and not nicely, either. As they pulled into their driveway, the daughter spoke up. "I have a question, Mom. When you're driving, are *you* ever the idiot?" We will get angry from time to time. But we are not to live in anger, for that leads to sin.

It is a sin to perpetuate hurts and slights and hatred by returning evil for evil, by hurting, slighting and hating others. Instead, we are to acknowledge our feelings, and then rise above them. Make our enemies our friends, like Wade Boggs did, with that belligerent baseball fan.

Whoever you might be angry with – think – is there a way to be kind to that person, even amid your anger. Is there a way for you to have a kind thought, and not go to bed angry – not even one more night of going to bed with anger in your heart? Can you imagine being free of the negative effects of anger? Isn't that worth working for-trying to do-in how we deal with anger?

As I said, the first two teachings this morning are God is truth (No. 1), and we are not – that's No. 2. The third basic, Christian teaching is that – while we are not by nature prone to Godly living – we can be better than we are. For example, Ephesians says, "Thieves must give up stealing...." This, of course, could be applied to each of the 10 Commandments, which are summed up by Jesus when he says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind..." and "...love your neighbor as yourself."

Extending the example of how to apply Christian teachings, Ephesians says, rather than being thieves, people "should labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy." Having something to share with the needy points to our fourth and final basic, Christian teaching for today. We can be better, AND this benefits everyone – us, God and others.

When we seek to be better Christians by giving to the needy, that actually benefits us in the long run. First of all, we are all in need of something, and secondly, each of us is subject to times of great need.

If everyone contributed as able to the common welfare of society, God assures us there would be abundance for everyone, the world over. Sadly, we don't do that, do we? Humans by nature are competitive and "me oriented." That's why we need to hear and learn and rehear and practice basic, Christian teachings, and encourage others to do likewise.

Following the teachings of scripture benefits us, God, and everyone. It benefits us because we have our needs met and it benefits God by building up the kingdom of God. For example, Ephesians says, "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." Building up the kingdom of God!

By applying scriptural lessons in our lives we participate in the building up of God's kingdom – we are a blessing to God. God benefits. And not only does God benefit, but all people benefit. It comes full circle. Our needs are met, God's kingdom is strengthened, and, as Ephesians says, our words and actions "give grace to those who hear." Everyone benefits when we live out the teachings of our faith. We create a self-perpetuating, reciprocal circle of Christian hope, peace, joy and love.

Now, I know that is a lot to remember and apply in life. So let's focus this week on one simple teaching from today's scripture lesson: Ephesians says, "Be kind to one another." "Be kind to one another" is the ABC Bible Verse that Jill & Ed are teaching to the children in Children's church, as we speak. Last week's ABC verse was "Ask and you shall receive," focusing on praying. Today it is, "Be kind to one another."

If the children can learn to be kind to one another, can't we? Of course we can. It just takes hearing and learning and rehearing and practicing basic, Christian teachings, and encouraging others to do likewise.

The four basic, Christian teachings from today are: No. 1) God is truth. No. 2) We are not. No. 3) We can be better. And No. 4) This benefits everyone – us, God and others. God is truth, we are not, we can be better, this benefits everyone. In other words, "be kind to one another." Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Holy God, your people need you. They need your love, your grace, and your unending mercy. They need to know your truth, to experience your peace.

God, they need your guidance and your wisdom. They need your strength.

God, they need all of these things, and we know that you can give us all that we need. But, God, let us never seek after only the things that you can give. Give us, first and foremost, yourself.

We pray your Spirit of healing upon all those continuing to recover from injury and illness. We pray your comfort upon those who grieve

We pray for ourselves, Lord, that you would draw us to yourself, through which all else will be added. We need you, first. We love you, first. We desire you, first in our lives.

Here our prayer, O Lord, as we pray together as you taught us, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts, as we forgive
our debtors;
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,
For thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, forever. Amen.**