

08/08/2021 Ephesians 4:25 - 5:2 Pastor Fraser Pearce

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives us, his disciples,
What is called the Golden Rule; you've heard it before:

'In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.' Matthew 7:12

This Golden Rule is more than a command:

It is an invitation for us to exercise our imaginations,

To think about what it is like to be someone else,

To experience life as they experience it,

And to consider how *we'd* like to be treated

If we walked in *their* shoes.

Jesus is saying that when we see this imaginative way of life lived out,

We see what the law and the prophets look like;

We see what God, the true Father, wills for his children,

And we see that the life of love is filled with the glory of God.

Now St Paul in his letters, including the letter to the Ephesians

Which we are hearing in church Sunday by Sunday,

Is encouraging us to understand that as we receive the Gospel,

That is, the Good News that for Christ's sake our sins are forgiven,

We are adopted into the family of God,

And we are joined together with many brothers and sisters in this family,

St Paul is encouraging us to understand that Christ himself

Is in our hearts and among us as a community:

It's not just that we have a standard to live up to,

But that Christ himself shares his mindset and his strength with us,

So that his life of imaginative, outward-focused love can be seen among us,

So that people who see this life of love can give glory to God.

In today's reading St Paul fleshes out some of the shape of this new way of life,

And so gives us the encouragement that comes from knowing

That it is God at work among us as we place our trust in Christ Jesus.

As we live out our identity as people baptised into Christ,

We share *his* mind, we have *him* at work in our hearts.

Here's how St Paul starts: **So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another.**

Notice how St Paul ends this word of encouragement: **‘for we are members of one another’**.

The basic fact is that through faith in Christ we truly belong together,
We are the one body of the Lord,
And so we are not in competition with each other;
Rather, we have the same goal of living to the glory of God.

Think about an analogy from sport.

It’s a normal part of many sports to give our opponents

A false idea of what we are intending to do:

To pretend we are going to pass the ball when we are not,

Or to give them the idea that we are going to kick in one direction

When in fact we will kick in the other.

That’s how it is when we are in competition: we deceive: it’s part of the game.

But when we are on the same team, we set deceit aside,

We make our intentions clear to our team members:

At least we do if we want to work together well as a team,

If we want to reach the goal of sporting victory,

And the glory that comes with it.

Well, we, in Christ Jesus, are no longer in competition with each other:

We are on the same team, invited in by the call of our Lord,

And we have the same goal of glorifying God our Father.

This means that we don’t need to deceive each other,

But can, in our speaking, treat each other as we’d like to be treated,

By saying what is true, and by saying what is true in love:

That is, with the goal to build each other up.

Again, think about the analogy of a sporting team that works well:

The members encourage each other, even after,

And sometimes especially after, one of them makes a mistake.

They are willing to give tips to each other about what works well,

They are able to challenge each other,

And they are able to rouse each other when things are tough.

I don’t normally bring up Shane Warne as an example to follow,

But credit where credit is due:

The 1999 world cup semi final between Australia and South Africa.

Seemed, half way through, unwinnable from an Australian point of view.

But when Warne got the first important wicket for Australia.
He roused the whole Australian team:
He circled his arms in an upward motion and said, 'C'mon! C'mon!'
The same thing for his second wicket, and the same sort of thing
From the third wicket to the end of the game.
By his speech he helped encourage the whole team to victory.

OK: Let's learn, at last in this respect, from Shane Warne:
We are on the same team, let's speak the truth to each other:
Let's encourage each other in the life of love,
The love that God has for all people.

St Paul then goes on to give teaching that we all need to hear:
Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil.

No one needs to teach us to get angry when we ourselves
Have our dignity affronted, or when we see others treated badly.
And, in fact, getting angry can be the right response.
Just like it's a right response to feel pain we touch something hot,
It's right to feel anger when there is injustice.
But what do we do when we are angry?
St Paul encourages us to refrain from sinning in our anger,
From letting our anger give us energy in treating others with injustice.
Like the saying goes: speak when you're hot with anger
And you'll say the best things you wish you'd never said.
But more than this, St Paul encourages us to deal with our anger as it arises,
And to not let it drag in day after day.

In preparation for this sermon I came across a reflection on this text
From St John Chrysostom, who lived over a millennia and a half ago,
But who could have written these words today; have a listen:

I appeal to you to extinguish your anger before the sun sets. For if you fail to master it on the first day, both the next day and often even for a year you will prolong it and the enmity will increase from then on without any further help. For enmity causes us to suspect that words spoken in one sense were meant in another, the same with gestures, and these infuriate and exasperate us and make us more angry than madmen, not wanting to say a person's name or to hear it, and speaking it ourselves with invective and abuse.

Well, the more things change the more they stay the same.

He then goes on to give some practical advice:

How are we to quiet this passion?... By reflecting on our own sins, and how much we have to answer for to God; by remembering that we are bringing vengeance not on an enemy but on ourselves; by reflecting that we are delighting our real enemy, the devil, and that for his sake we are doing wrong to the members of our own body. St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians*

To the members of our own body: there's the theme in today's reading.

Brothers and sisters, we belong together.

For this sermon we'll look at one other part of the teaching

That St Paul gives us; listen to what he says:

Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labour and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy.

On the one hand this, of course, forbids Christian people

From making a living by stealing from others.

Now it's rather unlikely that any of us here are professional thieves,

If we are, then we need to stop. It's as simple as that.

But all of us need to hear this teaching if we are to think through

What it means to treat others as we want to be treated

When it comes to property.

So if we are an employer we need to think about how we pay people

And whether what we pay is fair, whether it is just.

Likewise if we work for others we need to think about how we use our time:

Are we giving our employers just labour for our wage?

The same sort of thing when it comes to paying our taxes,

Or downloading music or movies.

Are we treating others as we'd like to be treated ourselves?

This works even with bigger issues

That we may not perceive as being in our control,

Such as the relative wealth of the nations of the world,

Or the material circumstances of the indigenous people in our own country.

Because, as St Paul says, when it comes dealing in love

In matters of property it is not just about refraining from theft,

It's also about being able to share with those in need.

The focus is, in other words, ultimately outward, to our neighbour.

To the one whom God calls us to love as he has loved us.

As St Paul says in the conclusion of today's reading,
We are beloved children of God,
And as beloved children we are free to imitate our Father in heaven
As we live in love: The same love that we have seen most clearly
In the self sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ:
The one who loved us, and gave himself up for us
As a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

He is the one who not only gives us his word,
But who forgives our sins, and who reconciles us to our Father.
He is the one who shares his mind with us, and who lives by faith in our hearts.
So let us always encourage each other to live by faith in him,
So that his love may be seen among us, to the glory of God the Father. Amen!