

August 12, 2018
Sermon for the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Ephesians 4:17–5:2

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Ephesians 4:17–5:2 (ESV)

¹⁷ Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!— ²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. ²⁵ Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. ²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil. ²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. ²⁹ Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. ¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

This is every kid's favorite time of year, isn't it!

Summer! When you can sleep late, hang out with your friends, do as you please. Freedom! From all the rules of school and the schedules everybody else makes for you. Hope y'all have been enjoying it! Let's not even think about the number of days left until . . .

Of course, I always think this is the best time of year to be an adult too— mainly because it's such a great time for kids. I love watching kids at play, especially our own.

At the pool, at the playground, at the kitchen table playing cards or board games, or just interacting with each other at home when they're not tied down with homework.

I love seeing them here at church during VBS. And I *love* family vacations! Loading up in the car for lots of hours together, conversations we don't get to have when we're all running our own busy directions.

It's really interesting to watch children interact, isn't it? Sometimes they cooperate with one another so well, sometimes not so well; they're sinful like everybody else. What makes children get along with one another? We'd like to find the formula, wouldn't we? As with most things, I suppose, when it comes to raising children to cooperate in wholesome ways, and there are the two extreme views.

There's the liberal, permissive approach, kinda like free range parenting, and there's the strict, authoritarian approach where each action and reaction is controlled by the parent.

Wise parents, though, are looking for something in between.

Our heavenly Father is the wisest parent, and in our text this morning, our loving Father in heaven teaches His children to get along.

He knows the best of all teaching methodologies, and that means not going with neither extreme, but the strengths of both approaches. Human parents can draw some very good advice from this Word of God, but God isn't really speaking to us as parents. He's speaking to all of us as children, His children.

That's foundational for everything God says to us in our Text today from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians.

Our Father teaches us as His children. We are not His accidental children He is stuck with. Each one of you were planned. St. Paul assures us: "You were sealed for the day of redemption" (4:30b) "as beloved children" (5:1b).

We are children of God! All of us, no matter our age. In fact, we are sealed as His children. Oh, we can stray, but no one can snatch us away. Not because we are that good or tough but because God did it—He sealed us as His children—in our Baptisms.

Baptism is the visible act by which God puts His seal on us. It marks each one of us—both on the forehead and on the heart—as His child. Just like He did last week for little Grace Gilmore. I went through the motions, following His commands, but God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, did the sealing.

And by that act, God also takes responsibility for raising us, for teaching us those things that we normally think of a parent teaching a child. But all parents should look to God's teachings, long before they even become parents.

Like how to get along with one another. There are shelves upon shelves of secular books that tell us how to get along, but the ones that really work are the ones that come from God. For an example, we could look at the last three chapters of Ephesians.

Through Paul's letter to the Ephesians, God teaches us how to live with our fellow Christians, the rest of God's children.

Just like children, we sometimes get along well, and sometimes not so well.

We have our squabbles on the ball field, on the playground or even in our own backyard.

We call shotgun and fight over who gets which seat in the car. We might argue over who get the special plate, or picks the game or the movie, etc. We have water balloon battles where you're not sure who really wins as everyone gets soaked.

But the older we get, the more our squabbles turn into things like this:

We destroy someone's reputation through gossip, rather than shouting over who gets to bat first. We like to tell stories on each other; men just as well as women. Sometimes it almost makes us feel special to lift ourselves one up on the other guy.

Soaking each other with hard and abusive words, rather than with water that actually feels pretty good on a hot day.

That kind of behavior is no more acceptable among adult Christians than it would be among kids on summer vacation (4:17–19). If we wouldn't put up with children tearing each other down, then why do we allow or even participate as adults?

God expects us to be and to live better than that. (4:29–32a) Ephesians 4:29 (ESV)

“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.” (4:29)

We all want our children and grandchildren who are kind and forgiving of one another rather than bitter and angry. How can parents make that happen?

How does God make it happen in us?

Our heavenly Father has His don'ts and dos for getting along.

Remember that extreme permissive approach?

The parent gives full responsibility for development to the child? Again, like free range child rearing. Let them run wild and only get involved if they get hurt or if someone else tries to put of social or moral boundaries. The parent lets the child learn on his or her own how to get along; every day is a summer free for all.

The idea is that independence lets the child develop his or her creativity to the fullest. But this style doesn't take into account the sinful nature of all mankind.

Unfortunately, children in such totally permissive homes often develop an egocentric, "me first" view that leads way beyond water balloons.

Even more troubling is that this style often backfires on the parent. Children in such homes often develop resentment for parents who don't seem to care enough to provide guidance. They aren't appreciated for allowing the child to run free, they are often hated.

God certainly does not take this kind of *laissez-faire*, "anything goes" attitude with His children. He cares. In fact, when His children, when we sin, He grieves (4:30a).

The Holy Spirit is sometimes described as being like a parent. He is the one who teaches us God's will. And He grieves when we ignore it.

The Holy Spirit shows us God's love. And He grieves when our lives don't reflect that love.

Imagine the grief a parent feels when a son or daughter hurts someone else's child, or even worse when they commit a violent crime.

Imagine when a child rejects everything a parent has done for them, storming out of the house, vowing never to come back.

Or when a parent sees a child go the wrong way in life, perhaps destroying themselves with drugs or alcohol or unchristian relationships.

The Holy Spirit is grieved: When God's children hurt one another. With words in gossip or hearsay, even if we really didn't mean any harm. When we knowingly harm them financially, unjustly causing them to lose a job or taking advantage of them in a business deal.

Or when we reject everything God has done in creating, redeeming, and caring for us.

The Spirit is grieved whenever we hurt ourselves too. By falling into sin, thinking or rationalizing that it's not really that bad because it only hurts us. Wrong. We are hurting God too.

God cares about us too much to sit back and see whether we'll learn how to get along. He doesn't take a "boys will be boys" or "kids will be kids" attitude when Christians hurt one another. No, He commands! *"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice."* (4:31)

God definitely has His don'ts and dos for getting along. And it is completely inconsistent with Christian faith: For believers to fight, carry grudges, talk evil about other believers.

We are never called to hate or act in anger towards one another.

God commands His children to be kind and compassionate and forgiving. “*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*” (4:31–32a)

We are called to care about the hurt others are feeling at the death of a loved one.

We work to lift up others who are feeling weak when life seems to be going wrong, even if we tried to warn them about it before and we are called to bear with others’ sins and failures.

God is no permissive, “sit back and watch” parent. We could never resent Him as a Father who doesn’t care. He longs, He aches, for us to be kind and compassionate to one another. By His commands, He actively teaches us to get along. Still, you can’t compare Him to a parent of the other extreme approach, a strict authoritarian either.

Our Father uses a lot of love in getting us to get along (4:32–5:2).

You know the authoritarian model. Lots of rules but not a lot of reason. “Do it because I said so or else you’re going to get it.” The assumption is always “no” and you’re surprised when they actually say “yes.”

God doesn’t want grudging outward action as we obey due to threats. He wants our love. So He brings out love by working inwardly, working in our hearts. He showers us with huge doses of love (5:1). “*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*”

God wants us to be His, to be His children who would serve Him and one another willingly. That could only be possible if He removed the sin that separated us from Him.

That’s what Jesus did by dying and rising again. Paul says Jesus gave himself up as “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

Nothing the Old Testament people or we ourselves could present could please God like that, but Jesus pleased God for us. He was God demonstrating His love for us.

Once Christ had paid for the sins of the world, the Holy Spirit could come to us in Baptism and give us the forgiveness Jesus earned. The seal means we can be certain of eternal life when our last day comes. Ask little Grace Gilmore. If she could talk, she'd tell you all about it.

Baptism, eternal life—that's God demonstrating His love for us. For you!

God's love then teaches us to love; we imitate God's love (5:1).

The Greek word for "imitator", **μιμητής** [*mimetes*], gives us our word "mimic."

That's the way children learn, isn't it? Children mimic their parents. Children who live in a loving home see how it's done. Dad saying sweet things to Mom, spouses helping each other around the house—it rubs off.

God wants us to love, so He first loved us. He wants us to forgive, so He shows us how by first forgiving us. Even more important, God's love and forgiveness *motivates* us to love and forgive and get along.

A child who lives in a house of ill will not only won't know how to love, but he also won't want to. The anger he's received will be anger that has to come out. But a child who grows up in a loving family wants to be nice to other kids, wants to love other people.

We Christians are all growing up in the most loving family. In spite of all our sins, we're loved. God love you! He forgives you! You can't out sin the blood of Christ. When you repent, God doesn't even have to think about it. He forgives you!

In spite of our unworthiness, we're blessed every day.

In spite of our "bitterness and wrath," "anger," "clamor," "slander," and "malice," all who believe have eternal life.

As God showers His love on us, we pray, the by the power of His Holy Spirit, we are enabled to shower His love on others too.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus!

Amen.

S. D. G - Soli Deo Gloria

To God alone be glory