

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera QLD

11th August 2024 – Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

GUIDED BY GOD'S LOVE

Who are you? How do you answer that question; to others, and to yourself? There are all different ways of looking at it, aren't there? We could answer it in terms of our relationships. For me, I am a husband, father, son, brother, nephew, friend, colleague. We could answer it in terms of our profession/job/vocation, and what that says about us. In reflecting on that question, we may think about what our answers say to other people about us, and what they say about how we see ourselves. Or perhaps also, how we want to see ourselves and how we want others to see us.

Who are you? The way we look at ourselves not only determines how we answer that question, but it rolls on to be about how we think, how we act, what we do. It sets where we put our priorities; what is important to us. How we speak to and treat others. What we try our best to achieve. Why we do different things. And it also comes into who we want to be or who we are trying to be. We know that 'influencers' are a big thing nowadays. Quite simply, that's all about when someone says 'who are you?', people want to be able to say, 'I am that person'; so you buy what they buy, watch what they watch, do what they do, talk how they talk, with the desire to become them.

And following and copying others we know is a very natural and common human thing to do, isn't it. Children do it naturally; it's how they learn to do things, to act, to treat others. 'Monkey see, monkey do' is a term we use in our family when young ones are around. Parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, big brothers and sisters, etc learn very quickly that young ones who look up to you will copy what you do and say, especially the things you don't want them to! They want to be like you, to emulate you, and so they follow what you do.

Who are you? The one we haven't touched on yet is relating to our beliefs, which means that for most who are watching, listening to or reading this Address you would say, 'I am a Christian'. And that it is also what is said very clearly in this reading we have here today from Ephesians 4 and

5. Right near the end of this reading Paul writes, ‘After all, you are his dear children’ (5:1b). That is who we *are*. We are God’s children. We’re not trying to be His children, hoping to be His children, aiming to be His children. We *are* His children.

And why we can say that so definitely and confidently is in how this reading finishes up: ‘Christ loved us and offered his life for us as a sacrifice that pleases God.’ (5:2b) It’s through Jesus dying for us and rising again that we are now, through accepting this in faith, made children of God. That is who we are. That is what we are. Jesus made the perfect sacrifice for us which we couldn’t make for ourselves, the sacrifice which paid for our sins and brought us back into a full and perfect relationship with God. We are His children. And while we might wander away at times from Him, from His side nothing is going to change that. Who are you? A loved, forgiven, called, child of God.

What does that mean, why are we being reminded of that here? To stay at the end of our reading for now there are two sentences there which say so much, and also give us some pretty big challenges: ‘Do as God does’ (5:1a), and ‘Let love be your guide’ (2:a). Or, to put them together; Be Guided by God’s Love. We know that’s not as easy as it sounds, don’t we? There is a lot to that. And it is unpacked for us in what comes before at the end of chapter 4, so let’s go back up and have a look at that.

It’s all about relationships, so Paul starts by reminding us that as God’s children we are part of the same body. But one of the things which destroys relationships is lying. Relationships are based on trust, so of course when we lie that trust is broken. We can lie in what we say, but also in what we do, when who we say we are doesn’t come out in what we do; when we don’t do as God does or let love be our guide. When you answer the question ‘who are you?’, to others or to yourself, as ‘I am a Christian’, are your thoughts, words and actions always true to that?

We then move on to anger, always a good one. Anger itself is not a sin, Jesus Himself got angry. Anger can lead us to speaking out or acting against something which is wrong either against others or ourselves. But the warning here is, ‘Don’t get so angry that you sin.’ (4:26a) Ever have that happen for you? Do you ever say or do something in anger which you regret afterwards? This

teaching is a reminder to us of the call for us to control our anger, rather than let it control us, because when we let anger take over it does give the devil a chance to have his way. Don't let anger affect or even destroy your relationships with others, or with God. When it comes to anger, as with all things, be guided by God's love.

Something which is a common thread in all these teachings, is that they focus on us treating others in the right way. They are not about us. So, while the next bit is surprising for us, it fits in well with that. 'Quit stealing', no surprise there, but then, 'Be honest and work hard', why?, 'so you will have something to give to people in need.' (4:28) Not working for ourselves, but to help others! Goes against the teaching of the world, doesn't it? Being guided by God's love means that in all things we are outward looking. How do we go with that? Holding that up as a mirror to our lives, our priorities, what do we need to examine and possibly change so that we do let love be our guide?

Be careful in what we say, so that we build others up. There is a quote from Mother Theresa which says, 'Let no one come to you without going away better and happier'. Isn't that a good aim to have, that everyone we speak to will go away better and happier afterwards? Not always realistic, and there are times when things have to be said which don't make this possible, but as an overall approach to our interactions with people it is great. In all of our talk, whether it is spoken, written, typed and sent over the cyberspace, say things which build people up.

This ties in with the bit just down from here which says don't be bitter, angry and mad at others, or yell, curse or be rude. Instead, very simply, be kind, merciful, and forgiving. And it can be not just about what we say, but how and when we say it. We used to talk about someone having a sharp or bitter tongue, but now we can also speak about having sharp or bitter fingers (or thumbs) with things which can be said by email, text, or various social media platforms. Look at some of the things which people send or post, and the harm they can cause. Sometimes this is because it is straight out hurtful or hatred, but at others it's because of how it is sent and said. When I first came here 5 ½ years ago I said that 'email is for information, talking is for communication'. That's something I picked up over many years in schools when email wars would start between staff members over things

being said which were meant to be harmless but blew up quickly. When we email, text or post something, we can't pick up on the normal facial or body language cues that we have in face to face conversations, so we have no idea how that person is feeling at that time, what they're doing, what they're going through, so no matter how we intend what we write to be taken we don't know how it will be received. 'Be kind and merciful, and forgive others, just as God forgave you because of Christ.' (4:32 CEV) Wouldn't it be great if, for everyone, words like that were on our phone, tablet or computer screens. What would change in what we say and how we deliver it? How does being guided by God's love change how we interact with people in all ways?

When we think back not just at what we have gone through here, but thinking deeper about what this list says about how we treat and interact with people, it can be daunting, can't it? Even if we say now that we would like to do these things, and perhaps even identify changes we will make straightaway, we know the reality is that won't always be doing them.

That's when God reminds us who we are; His forgiven children. We are called to be guided by His love, but that is because we live in His love. Who are you? A loved and forgiven child of God. Ask God for His help to let this identity guide you in all your thoughts, words and actions each day, as living in His unconditional love you continue to try to live your life showing and sharing the love He gives to us. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Can you think of any funny instances among your family or friends of a young person copying or imitating someone they looked up to? In what ways can this kind of copying be a good thing? When can it be a negative thing?
- We are God's loved and forgiven children. Think about that identity we have because of what Jesus has done for us. How does it change our lives? What hope, peace, and confidence does it give us in the things we face each day?
- Our call is to be who we are, to be guided by God's love, especially in this case in the way we relate to and interact with others. Have a look back at the teachings in this Bible reading. If you have time, go through each one slowly. Use them as a mirror to look at how you relate to and interact with others. What changes can you make so that you do as God does and let His love be your guide? Confess to God the times you don't do these things in the way He calls you to, and ask for His strength and guidance to live out His love.

Pray: thank God for making us His loved and forgiven children. Ask Him to help us to be guided by His love in all we think, say and do.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
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