

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 for-gave you..

Last Sunday began this sermon series on Christian Intimacy, which tried to make the point of how very, very important is UNITY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST.

I had some feedback last week from different people. Some of it was:

- OK, if this UNITY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST is so important, what does this look like?
- If UNITY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST is so important, how do we go about doing it?

To which my answer was the same: That's why we call it a "sermon series." We can't put it all into one sermon. You have to come back next Sunday.

There was a little bit about what the UNITY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST looks like, in last week's overview sermon. It might bear repeating:

1. **All of life is fragile.** We have to let go of the gods of security and of control. They consume us. They take us away from the Gospel. They NEVER work out.
2. **All of life is gift.**
3. **It needs to be shared.**

Please remember that whenever we look at the teachings of the Apostle Paul, we need to make sure that we apply the litmus test of Jesus. In order to interpret, or verify, Paul's teachings, we should hold it up to the plumb line of Jesus.

When Jesus was asked WHAT IS THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT, he gave two commandments and said that they are really the same – like heads and tails of the same coin:

1. **You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.**
2. And the second is like the first: **you shall love your neighbor as yourself.**

If you check all the Gospels where this is repeated (as well as all of the instances in the First Testament, from which Jesus borrowed this commandment) you will note that it is NOT: **You shall love your neighbor AS YOU LOVE yourself.** It's not merely do unto others as you would like them to do unto you.

Rather, it is YOU and YOUR NEIGHBOR ARE ONE. If I hurt my neighbor, I am actually hurting myself, when I realize the UNITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST.

If something good happens to my neighbor, I ought not be jealous that it did not happen to me, when I realize the UNITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST.

Therefore I need to **love my neighbor as myself.**

If I drop a bowling ball on my big toe, I cannot say: "Oh, my toe hurts. Good thing that the rest of me feels fine," when I realize the UNITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST.

To **love my neighbor as myself** does not require me to have a certain EMOTIONAL frame of mind, as much as it requires me to recognize THE UNITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST and to ACT ACCORDINGLY.

LOVE is an ACTION TERM not an EMOTIONAL TERM.

So, as Paul continues in the scripture lesson we heard today, he goes to one of the biggest threats to the UNITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST – HOW WE USE OUR TONGUES, how we speak.

The Epistle of James says the same thing:

[L]ook at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. ⁵ So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.

How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! ⁶ And the tongue is a fire. ⁹ With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰ From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so.

That little, itsy-bitsy part of the body, the tongue – it has great power. So much so, that it is the first step in understanding the nature of the UNITY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST.

In a small Eastern European town, a man went through the community slandering the minister. One day, feeling suddenly remorseful, he begged the clergyman for forgiveness and offered to undergo whatever penance was required to make amends.

The pastor told the man to take a feather pillow from his house, tear it open, and scatter the feathers to the wind. The penitent man did as directed and returned to the church to report his work. “Now, am I forgiven?” he asked.

“Almost,” said the preacher. “Just one more task: you must go and gather all of the feathers.”

“But, that’s impossible,” lamented the one seeking forgiveness. “The wind has already scattered them.”

“Precisely,” said the old preacher. “And, although you truly wish to correct the evil you have done, it is as impossible to repair the damage done by your words as it is to recover the feathers.”

Good intentions, quite frankly, are not always enough.

Repentance can not always repair the damage done.

There is an ancient legend that one day in the future, all of the animals will come together and confront the snake, saying: “The Lion stalks and then eats its prey; the Wolf rips apart another animal in order to eat what it needs. But you, O Snake, what is the pleasure you derive in poisoning and killing a human being?” And the snake will respond, “What is the pleasure that humans derive in spreading malicious gossip about one another?”

The power of the tongue is immense.

It’s like the children’s sermon with which we have heard Janet teach – where she takes a tube of toothpaste and squeezes out a line of the white stuff and then invites the children to put the toothpaste back into the tube. Like words pouring from our mouths, the toothpaste cannot be returned.

Paul advises the people in Ephesus that they need to speak the truth – to allow TRUTHPASTE to come from their lips. But we must also SPEAK THE TRUTH WITH LOVE.

It's a good thing to never allow untruth to cross your lips, but the **UNITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST** does not require you to speak everything that happens to flitter across your mind.

LOVE is a greater value.

Sometimes, the more loving thing to do is to hold the tongue.

And sometimes, it might be that the person needs to hear something difficult to hear. But that doesn't mean that it has to be right now. There is a time and place for everything.

Ask yourself: AM I SAYING THIS FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE OTHER PERSON, or to make myself feel good? AM I SAYING THIS IN ORDER TO BUILD UP THE BODY OF CHRIST or to put somebody else down?

Speaking the TRUTH **WITH LOVE** is one of the most important things we can do for UNITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST.

And, just as it is important to sometimes **HOLD YOUR TONGUE**, it's also important, sometimes, **TO LET IT GO**.

It was after the funeral concluded, and everyone had left the cemetery except the bereaved widower and the pastor. The husband did not move a muscle in the direction of leaving. After sometime, the pastor said, **"The service is long over; it's time to go."**

"You don't understand I loved my wife," the man pushed the pastor away.

"I am sure you did," the pastor answered. **"But you have been here a very long time. Now, you should go."**

"You don't understand I loved my wife," the man repeated.

After another pause, the pastor urged him once more to leave the cemetery.

"You just don't understand," the man said for the third time. **I loved my wife. And once, I almost told her."**

The pastor who shared this story added: "Can you imagine the sense of shame -- to stand at a grave and bid farewell, and realize then, too late, what you didn't say when you **could** have, when you **should** have?"

It's as painful to the **one who didn't say**, as to the **one who didn't hear**.

Is there someone to whom you still have a chance to say something today that you don't know if you will have tomorrow?

One final word on this most important task of speaking the truth with love. And, perhaps, you are beginning to get the notion through all of this: **YOU HAVE TO ENGAGE YOUR MIND, and not just fly on auto-pilot or even have good intentions, in order to use TRUTHPASTE.**

This final word: **Say what you mean** and **THEN DO WHAT YOU SAY.**

Think of the person you know who so frequently promises much and delivers little. What are the names you use for that person? (Liar, Blowhard, Undependable) Even though it's a 'NICE PERSON'

And the thing is ... when this person tells you something, *which you have gotten to the point of not believing it as soon as they say it* ... the thing is THEY BELIEVE IT THEMSELVES, because they want to do it.

We have a tendency to **evaluate ourselves by INTENTION + EXCUSE.** So long as we mean to do it, but have a good excuse for not getting around to doing it, then we think we are OK.

HOWEVER, we tend to **evaluate others by whether or not they actually do what they say ... regardless of excuses** ... because, after so much repetition, the validity or sincerity of the excuse simply falls on deaf ears. The person hearing the excuse expected to hear some excuse for the failure to deliver, as soon as the promise to deliver was made. **TRUTHPASTE is not based on INTENTION; it is based on RESULT, on actually doing what you say.**

And it's not just about an individual's reputation ... it's about the impact on the UNITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST ... which is torn apart by the lack of truthpaste, even though intentions were good.

Speaking the truth in love – it is so vital to UNITY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST. It doesn't happen automatically. It doesn't happen just because we have good intentions.

Pay attention. Think before speaking. Allow Jesus to filter your words. And then ask Jesus to help you in all your speech and conduct. Not just for you. But for the BODY OF CHRIST, which the world so desperately needs.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.