



**“Accept One Imitation”**  
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**St. Andrew’s United Methodist Church**  
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**Ephesians 4:25- 5:2**

I’d ask you to hold on to that. Don’t put that away just yet. We’re going to walk through this scripture again like we did a couple weeks ago. This is a continuing story, a continuing saga, a continuing sermon series, if you will, on church management, church leadership and church participation. That’s what Ephesians is really. It’s a lesson in discipleship for the community, not just for individuals. You know all too often today we hear about the church wanting to tell us that faith is really an individualistic thing, that it’s all about me and what I get and how I’m saved and what that plays out for in eternity for me and making sure that I have, that I have that place secure in heaven.

Well the early church leaders didn’t think in those terms. They thought very differently. In the early church the Christian faith was not an individual thing. It was a community. It was a community of believers. That you were a believer that’s one thing, but the way you live out your belief is in community, not alone, not by yourself. You see today we got all the other things. We’ve got just the opposite of that. We’ve got people who are stressing that real faith has to do with what’s in your soul, in your spirit and we’ve got books and people lecturers and such that try to get you to recognize who you are in your inner self as an individual and that’s spirituality. My dear friends, that’s not what the early church believed, not at all. Their understanding of living out spirituality was in community, was in the world. It was not of the world, but in the world definitely.

And so what we have in the letter of Ephesians is a wonderful teaching example of okay so you’ve got faith as an individual, but you know what, here’s how you are supposed to live it out. You’re not supposed to do it on your own and to each their own. No, no, that’s not the way it works. He starts out and he says so then putting away falsehood, that is to say putting away anything that is not true, that does not have the truth of the spirit in it, putting away all falsehood, all those lies, all those perpetuations, those myths of your former life as pagan believers of whatever pagan gods you had, putting away all of that stuff, speak the truth to one another. He says, “Let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors.” Now you have to know that in first century Christianity when they say speak the truth they are talking about the truths that Jesus proclaimed about God and God’s love and God’s great gift of grace to all of us. So when he says speak the truth to our neighbors, preach the gospel and when someone goes astray preach the gospel harder. Remind them of who they are. Remind them of what God has done for them. Bring them back into the fold and sometimes you can see it, our toes get curled up, you know, inside our shoes because we don’t want to hear it cause they start stepping on toes when they start speaking the truth. He says, “Do it anyway.” Put away all falsehood. Don’t be worried about offending and chasing someone off when you’re speaking the truth. Speak the truth in love, but speak the truth for we are members of one another. This isn’t an individual thing. No man, no woman is an island. It doesn’t work that way. That’s not what this is. We are all members of one another. We are a community.

Then he gets in there and he says be angry. It’s okay to be angry. Righteous indignation was something that was a hallmark of Jesus’ preaching style. If you remember he chased off those Pharisees and Sadducees, got ‘em all excited and got ‘em all angry at him but he was angrier at them for the ways that they were misleading the community that was entrusted to them. You remember that in the Gospels, Jesus said, “You blind guides, you brood of vipers...” You know he was angry at them. I mean you know he wasn’t calling them just pet names. He was mad. But do not let your

anger lead you to sin. Be angry, but do not sin and resolve your anger before the sun goes down. Don't fester. Don't let it sit there and seethe inside of you and fester because what it does is it begins to destroy. Don't let the sun go down on your anger and do not make room for the devil. That's what that means. It's a perpetuation of that. Be angry, but do not sin. It's so hard for us to think of people who get angry as being sane or being holy or faithful people because you know, I know a fellow that's a preacher and so help me I don't know what it would take to just tick him off because I've never seen him angry. Well, I have a feeling he gets angry. I just have never seen it. Thank goodness I've never been the recipient of it. But you wonder about folks like that. Do they every get angry. Well, yes, be angry. Be angry at the times and the places and the ways that the community of believers turn inward and turn selfish. Be angry at that, but don't sin. Don't let that anger turn to sin because that makes room for the devil and divisiveness and destruction.

But he's also talking not just about anger as a part of the community of believers and speaking the truth because we are all members of one another. He's talking about inclusiveness, too, because the very next verse talks about thievery and thieves, he says, "Thieves must give up stealing." Duh! You know! Thieves must give up stealing, rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands. Why, so as to have something to share with the needy because we're community. It's okay to share with the needy but do it honestly and do it with integrity. That's what the world is looking at. They are looking for a way to bring us down as a community of believers. Thieves are included. Everyone is welcome into this. Remember Jesus? He always ate lunch and dinner with folks who were always the outcasts from the Synagogue and the Temple. These were the ones that were outcasts. They were the sinners, they were the tax collectors, they were the prostitutes, they were all the people that had shady pasts and some shady presence but Jesus always ate with them and he included them in on the kingdom and his teachings about the kingdom. The church needs to do that too. We need to be inclusive. We need to open our arms and our hearts and our doors and our minds and our lives to these folks so that they can be redeemed. Not to open our pocketbooks, not open up our safes and our jewelry boxes, but open our hearts because we have a gospel that redeems. Thieves are invited into the community, too, but they need to stop thievery.

In essence what this writer is telling us is that everything that we used to do we don't do any more because we've had a change of life, we've had a change of heart, we've had a change of soul and spirit and it is so much important to us that he give the next statement there. "Let no evil talk come out of your mouths." Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, idle gossip. That's part of it. Some of it is just I just can't stand that person. I don't know what it is, I just can't stand that person, they just rub me the wrong way and usually when they are saying that, they are saying that to someone else and unfortunately that person gets a colored or a kind of a bad taste about that person, too, don't they? They get influenced the wrong way and that's something that we shouldn't be doing. We shouldn't be doing that. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths. The only kind of talk that should come out of your mouths is that which is useful for building up because that's who we are. We are here to build each other up, not tear each other down. We're not here to compete with one another – I'm more spiritual than you are. What? That's not community of believers.

Only what is useful for building up as there is need so that your words may give grace to those who hear. Because that's what we're talking about, we're talking about reproving someone and bringing someone back into the fold and helping them to once again be a part of the community and not only be a part of the community but get back in relationship with God and Jesus, find that truth again, speaking that truth once again. Only that which is useful for building up, that's what we need to be talking about when we talk about others. You know there is great potential in so and so. We can see that potential. What can we do to bring that out? That's the kind of talk that builds us up.

And then he gets to the crux of the matter. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God. I mentioned that one preacher that I know that I don't know what it would take to make him angry. It hurts a pastor to think about what would hurt the Holy Spirit. It should hurt a Christian, too. What does it mean to grieve the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is that which gives us life and abundance. The Holy Spirit is that which reminds us of who we are and reminds us of all the things that Jesus had taught us. The Holy Spirit is the comforter that defends us and strengthens us and encourages us and builds us up. Can you imagine what it would take to grieve the Holy Spirit of God, a community that's torn apart, a community that's going all sorts of different directions but not one solitary direction, a community that doesn't have anything in common with one another and doesn't seek to find that reconciliation with one another, a community that is honestly seeking to be comfortable in and of itself and does not wish to reach out. That grieves the Holy Spirit. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God with which you were marked, you plural, you all, each individual, but you all collectively were marked with the seal for the day of redemption. The Holy Spirit that gives you redemption and salvation and life, don't grieve it, don't do anything that would grieve it.

You want some examples: Put away from you all those things that would grieve the Holy Spirit – bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, that's one of my favorites – wrangling. What was it they said in the new International Version, they said it was, it wasn't wrestling, it was something like that, brawling, wrangling and brawling. I get the impression of that word wrangling and brawling is that we're elbowing our way ahead of the others, trying to get our own stuff first. It's kind of like I'm going to get to be the first one in line. Put away from yourselves all that stuff that divides. Together with all malice, that's the last one, slander, together with all malice these things grieve the Holy Spirit. These things destroy community. These things are what tear the church apart. These are the things that can kill the Christian world, the Christian faith and the kingdom possibilities. These are the things that grieve the Holy Spirit. Instead, be Christ to one another. I know it says be kind there, but there is a play on words here you have to know. This was written in Greek and the word in Greek is literally Chrestoy and it comes as a parallel, a play on the word Christes, which means Christ and they did that on purpose. Christ is kindness. Be kind to one another. Be Christ to one another. Be Christ offering grace, offering mercy. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another. When we mess up, it's okay.

I keep thinking of that poor woman who was drug out in the middle of the street, she was probably naked and dirty and filthy and the whole bit. She was caught in the act of doing something she wasn't supposed to be doing. You know down in Tennessee, we call that 'being necked' you know 'necked' is different than being naked. Naked means you don't have any clothes on, but 'neked' means you were doing something you shouldn't ought to have been doing without any clothes on and she was 'neked' and they threw her out on the street and said you know the law of Moses says we're allowed to stone her, what do you say? And Jesus, do you remember that whole story? Remember what Jesus said to the girl at the end? Where are your accusers? There's no one here but you. Well go home but don't sin any more, go home, but don't do this any more. That's grace, that's that mercy, that's that tenderheartedness, that's that patience, being kind to one another. When you catch someone in the middle of doing something that you know one another, forgiving one another as God and Christ has forgiven you and then this is it. Therefore be imitators of God. Now he's not telling us to be Gods. Don't be God. There is only one God and you're not it. Okay! There's only one and your resume falls way short. You don't have the credentials. You can't be God, but be an imitator of God as a beloved child as beloved children love each other the way God loves us. That's what he's saying, "Be imitators of God as beloved children and live in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

How many times have we seen in television commercials or car sales pitches or all of those things that try to get us to recognize that this is the real deal? Accept no imitations. This is the real deal, only to find out that well it may not be the real deal after all. The writer of Ephesians is telling us that there is only one real deal for the community of believers to be faithful and for the world to understand and to take notice is not Christ like and you know that they know it's not Christ like, with patience and tenderheartedness and kindness reprove them, you know better, I know you know better, let's work on this. You're not browbeating them, put your brow back, get that thing back on your forehead, you don't have to reach out there and.... it's just grace. Be Christ to we need to live in love being imitators of God with the Grace of God, the forgiveness of God, the blessing of God, the love of God, the patience and mercy of God, especially with one another, but more especially with everyone that we meet.

They say it is said that preachers live in glass houses and the glass house is usually up on a pedestal. Everybody watches the preacher's family to find out what is going on and so that's why we have this reputation of PK's. You ever heard of a PK (it's a preacher's kid). Well that preacher's kid is a wild one, I tell you. In seminary we learned a different name for it, we call it TO's, they are theological offspring, but they have the same reputation. Preachers and preachers' families are always living in a glass globe or glass ball, bowl and on a pedestal and the whole world sees us and we're supposed to be perfect. Well, believe it or not, the world looks at the Christian faith with a microscope looking for imperfections and when we give them all the imperfections there are within us, they go "see there, they're not as perfect as you thought they were."

The writer of Ephesians is saying, don't give them that chance, be intentional about how you live, be intentional about how we come together as community, be intentional about who we are. It's not an individual thing, it's a collective thing. It's a community. We're members of one another. There's another word for that, you know it, any body want to shout it out? We're family. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are family. Let's take care of each other like family. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen!