

“Living the New Life?”

Sermons.com reports, “There is an old, old story about a cantankerous, crabby old man. His neighbors avoided him. His four boys moved away from home as soon as they could. You get the picture. His poor wife stood by him, but it was not easy.

One night he went to bed and just slipped away. His four boys were called in. What should they do? ‘He was hard to live around,’ one of them said, ‘and no one could get along with him, but he was our pa. We owe him a decent burial, out in the meadow beyond the field.’

So they went out to the barn and found some boards and made a casket. They put the box on their shoulders and carried it out past the barn. As they passed through the gate, one of the boys bumped into the post and this caused them to drop the box. The casket broke open and the cantankerous, crabby old man sat straight up. He was alive! He had only been in a very deep . . . sleep!

Well, life got back to normal. He lived two more years, just as ornery and mean, cantankerous and crabby as ever. The boys could go back to their homes, but his poor wife had to stay and put up with him. Then one night he went to bed and just slipped away . . . this time for good.

His four boys were called in. What should they do now? ‘Well,’ said one of them, ‘he was hard to live around, and no one could get along with him, but he was our pa. We owe him a decent burial, out in the meadow beyond the field.’

So they went out to the barn and found some boards and made a casket and put the old man in it. They put the box on their shoulders and started out of the house. And as they did, their mother – the old man’s wife – said sternly, ‘Boys, when you get out by the barn . . . BE CAREFUL GOING THROUGH THAT GATE.’” The sermon.com staff pointed out, “That cantankerous old man should have read our lesson for the day.” (sermons.com, “Dealing with Cantankerous People”)

In the Lectionary New Testament Epistle Reading, the Apostle Paul wrote the believers in Ephesus about the subject of the New Life Christians are to live. **In today’s American culture, very few folks seem to practice the New Life in Christ, as Paul described.** Indeed, that cantankerous man’s words and actions – although unpleasant to those who were constantly exposed to them might be admired or cheered on when he or she focuses upon adversaries or enemies. Some politicians, their supporters, and their media allies have been encouraging disrespectful – politically incorrect speech and behaviors for a long time. For those of us, who watched the debate last Thursday evening, how did the answer, to the question on the subject of making derogatory comments about women come across to you?

The Apostle Paul called for the believers in Ephesus to live lives freed from such angry motivations and responses. He wrote **in verses 25 and 26, “No more lying, then! Each of you must tell the truth to the other believer, because we are all members together in the Body of Christ. If you become angry, do not let your anger lead you into sin, and do not stay angry all day.”** Continuing Paul’s emphasis on appropriate speech, he specifically wrote **in verse 29, “Do not use harmful words, but only helpful words, the kind that build up and provide what is needed, so that what you say will do good to those who hear you.”** We will momentarily skip verse 30, so we can follow Paul’s train of thought on how Christians are to talk to one another. Paul stated in **verse 31, “Get rid of all bitterness, passion, and anger. No more shouting or insults, no more hateful feelings of any sort.”** Hum, it seems some present day politically active Christian brothers and sisters have either forgotten or never read those admonitions from the Apostle Paul!

Now, just how important was that angry and charged rhetoric to Paul? Paul revealed the seriousness with which he perceived the problem of Christians using hate speech in **verse 30, “And do not make God’s**

Holy Spirit sad; for the Spirit is God's mark of ownership on you, a guarantee that the Day will come when God will set you free." Clearly, the Apostle understood allowing one's self to be controlled by anger and hate speech creates the situation in which God's Holy Spirit – the mark of **God's ownership on us is saddened – disappointed by our failure to live the New Life in Christ.**

The Apostle Paul was not content with denouncing hate speech – he went on the offensive by describing how to live the New Life in Christ to the Ephesians and to us. He wrote in **verse 32, "Instead, be kind and tender-hearted to one another, and forgive one another, as God has forgiven you through Christ."**

When a white racist recently killed those devout folk in the Black South Carolina church, the news media and many other people were astounded because the surviving family members told the murderer they forgave him! Clearly, they had been well taught from the Scriptures, such as today's Reading, and they internalized it – they lived it.

Forgiving one another as God has forgiven us is something many people cannot do! It always amazes me when avowed Christians refuse to forgive some else, while they claim God's forgiveness. Paul, evidently, had similar experiences, and so, he combined an important motivation for us to live the way of forgiveness and self-giving love with the example of our Divine Parent's Agape Love for us, as he declared in **verses 1 and 2 of chapter 5, "Since you are God's Dear Children, you must try to be like Him. Your life must be controlled by agape love, just as Christ agape loved us and gave his life for us as a sweet-smelling offering and sacrifice that pleases God."** Unfortunately, those who spew hate speech and name calling denounce the way of our Divine Parent's Self-Giving and Sacrificial Agape Love and Forgiveness! Further, they sadden God's Holy Spirit, for they delude themselves into thinking they are doing God's Will.

Rev. Kathryn Matthews (Huey) suggest, "Today's reading is a good sketch of what it looks like if we say yes to God. If we claim our identity in Christ, if we know ourselves as members of a body, how can we be at war with one another, outwardly or underneath the surface and behind one another's back?" She continued, **"If we truly belong to one another and to the Body of Christ, how can we hurt one another with angry words and actions?"** Huey disclosed, "When we act out of anger, we hurt ourselves, in a very real sense, as the members of a body should not and would not hurt each other."

Kathryn concludes by asking, **"If God has been generous and forgiving to us, how can we who belong to God be anything but generous and forgiving, anything but kind to one another?"**

[weeklyseeds.com, "Shaping Community," by Rev. Kathryn Matthews (Huey)]

So now, we come to that time when each of us asks ourselves, "Am I Living the New Life?" Have I put aside hate speech and actions? Have I forgiven those, who I believed had wronged me? Am I following God's Self-Giving and Sacrificial Agape Love and Forgiveness – am I imitating the Creator and the Son of God?

When we refuse to forgive or to love with self-giving and suffering agape love, we hurt the one we believe has harmed us but, perhaps more importantly, we actually imprison ourselves in anger and damage our relationships and our own lives. So, it is good and wise for us to periodically examine ourselves, especially our speech and actions.

Do our words and actions show we are living the New Life in Christ – the life of agape love and forgiveness? Or, does our speech and deeds show, instead, we are controlled by our anger and self-centered desires? Living the New Life? Let's always remember, what Paul wrote in **verses 1 and 2 of chapter 5, "Since you are God's Dear Children, you must try to be like Him. Your life must be controlled by agape love, just as Christ agape loved us and gave his life for us as a sweet-smelling offering and sacrifice that pleases God."** Or as Paul wrote to the Colossians, as is included in the middle of today's Call To Worship, **"You must forgive one another just as the Lord has forgiven you. And to all these qualities add agape love, which binds all things together in perfect unity."** Amen.