

Christ Church - Clean-hearted living - Truth telling

9 Aug 2015

Sermon by Glo Wellman

Ephesians 4:25 _ 5:2

²⁵So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another.

²⁶Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and do not make room for the devil.

²⁸Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy.

²⁹Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption.

³¹Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, ³²and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

⁵Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, ²and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

The Message

²⁵ What this adds up to, then, is this: no more lies, no more pretense. Tell your neighbor the truth. In Christ's body we're all connected to each other, after all. When you lie to others, you end up lying to yourself.

^{26_27} Go ahead and be angry. You do well to be angry—but don't use your anger as fuel for revenge. And don't stay angry. Don't go to bed angry. Don't give the Devil that kind of foothold in your life.

²⁸ Did you use to make ends meet by stealing? Well, no more! Get an honest job so that you can help others who can't work.

²⁹ Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift.

³⁰ Don't grieve God. Don't break his heart. His Holy Spirit, moving and breathing in you, is the most intimate part of your life, making you fit for himself. Don't take such a gift for granted.

^{31_32} Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you.

^{5: 1_2} Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.

One of my favorite scriptures is Psalm 51 - Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Restore me.... and give me a willing spirit.

Read Psalm 51

After two weeks of Rummage Sale prep, I'll bet several folks here could use some restoration right now. And thanks to everyone who helped out. What a day yesterday.... and certainly the large take creates some energy and willingness for future efforts. You all are awesome.

With the inspiration of this psalm, and readings from Ephesians, last week I began a series I'm calling clean-hearted living. I spoke of humility and maturity last Sunday, not as traits that we finally attain, but as attitudes and perspectives that we strive for. And how important it is to recognize that we are one among many, all with our own gifts. We are no better or worse than anyone else. And no matter who we are, we can all dance! "Set our once broken bones to dancing." No matter what befalls us, whatever challenges come our way, we are strengthened and buoyed up to deal with those things by being able to find moments of joy and uplift.... when our spirits dance.... like how we felt yesterday... there was a big collective happy dance at the end of the day's sales. Clean-hearted living isn't something we finally reach once and for all. We need to humbly ask daily for guidance to choose responses to life that lead to open hearts and spirits.... kindness toward self and others.

As we continue our way through the Ephesians scriptures today, we are given more reminders about what we can do to get along with others to live clean-hearted lives. Can we really ever get along? Today, one of these lessons for us is about truth telling. I consider myself a basically honest person. But truth telling is complicated, isn't it. There are many layers. Certainly, most of us learned early on how important it is to be tactful.... that means sometimes we don't tell the entire truth. There are some things it is best to not even say.... not to open our mouths.

Yes, we value the truth. When my kids were little, I'm not sure how exactly, but their bodies or expressions often gave me clues that what they were saying was less than the truth. Maybe I'd already seen them playing with that thing that got broken. Or I'd heard them saying something or I'd seen something. Or they promised their homework was done but long standing evidence suggested that may not be true. So, we felt we needed to check it.

Even though we'd told the childhood story of the "Boy who cried wolf", developmentally children in the school-aged years still like to try to get away with something less than the truth. There are many possible explanations for this. Some may even apply to us. Maybe they were embarrassed. Or they were hoping to avoid some kind of consequence. Or there is some kind of wish fulfillment.... telling the way they really would like it to be. Maybe their hope and sincere belief was that they'd fix it... or finish it before bedtime. Sometimes the lie makes them look cooler in their friends' eyes. And they may have seen or heard or caught adults lying, giving the impression this was okay. Certainly lying takes creativity, and their success is partly a result of their skill. You may have some memories of your own of a "big whopper" you told (successfully or not) during your childhood.

We told our kids how important it was to tell the truth. We even said if they told the truth, we'd work it out somehow, without punishment. If we found out they had lied, the consequences would be tougher. Children learn to be honest.... at least partly from us. How do we respond? How do we show that we value the truth and model honesty?

Another complication of truth telling is that what is true for one person may not be true for another. I found some "universal truths" online that we may not all agree with.... Read (see back pages)

Truth in our relationships can be challenging to say the least. What I believe and need and want may be very different from your perspective. A few simple examples.... Dishes are supposed to be loaded in the dishwasher just this way... Everyone knows that _____ are always put in this location so we can all find it. There is one right way to fold a towel.

Yes, we realize that we all have our own ideas about what's true for us. But in all honesty.... there probably are *some* universal truths that most of us *can* agree upon.

We need each other. We're not meant to go through life alone and isolated.

We want and need love and acceptance.

Everything is connected in some way (even if by some degrees of separation)

There is enough to go around if we share fairly.

Truth telling isn't just about being honest.... and not lying. It is also about being true to one's self and speaking up assertively for what we need and want. It is about paying attention and listening to each other, especially creating an environment of safety. It is sometimes easier to share when we know the other person is going to refrain from giving advice or criticizing our opinion. Getting along takes a great deal of willingness and patience and trust and a sense of fairness.

Sometimes our truth comes out in our anger. Anger is not good or bad. It's what we do with it that makes it hurtful or not. Our anger is a signal that something is wrong.... something hurts.... our fears are heightened.... something is clashing with our truth.

Our scripture says, "Be angry, but do not let the sun go down on your anger." Don't let your anger fuel revenge or retaliation. Righteous anger comes at least sometimes from feeling like something is just not fair. It's not living up to some universal truth that guides our beliefs. We can use our anger to fight for justice.... but should not to fight with our fists. We are called to speak up.... to speak the truth for others, as their advocate.

Without meaning to, sometimes we step on each other's toes. Some of our own angry reactions are because something was said or done that has hurt our feelings or offended us. Often the offending person did not truly mean to do that. Several years ago I learned about three questions to ask ourselves before telling someone a piece of our mind - Is what I really want to say "... kind? Is it true? And is it necessary?" If we can say "No" to anyone one of these, we are cautioned to keep our thoughts to our self.

I was in a business meeting this week for a group I've participated in for quite some time. We have gotten to know and appreciate each other. We were discussing making a change to our format to allow for more openness in letting others join us. Several of us knew that at least one of the people had strong objections to the change for very good reasons of her own. In the meeting, we each spoke, one person at a time. And there was not feedback after each person's truthful feelings. Everyone had an opportunity to speak. The person who was noticeably shaken had objections and still felt safe enough to speak her truth. And because she did, another person had the courage to also share concerns. Everyone was heard. Even though the majority of people wanted to make the change, two people's honest concerns were strong enough that the rest of the group honored where they were right now, the level of comfort and safety they needed. If this

was a meeting based solely on a vote, the majority would have ruled otherwise. But we were loving witnesses to each other's perspectives. Each person trusted that they could safely speak their truth. This was an emotionally charged meeting. But I was left with comfortable satisfaction with the process of consensus... of community... of speaking the truth with love... and ultimately creating an opportunity to be advocates for another.

William Stafford's poem "The Way It Is" speaks to me of connection.... of community, and the thread of truth that holds us together.

There's a thread you follow. It goes among
things that change. But it doesn't change.
People wonder about what you are pursuing.
You have to explain about the thread.
But it is hard for others to see.
While you hold it you can't get lost.
Tragedies happen; people get hurt
or die; and you suffer and get old.
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.
You don't ever let go of the thread.

We are in the midst of tough times. The ground under our feet feels shaky all too often. We feel this personally and our country also seems to be struggling to find its way... to become secure again in some of the values that shaped our beginnings. We need to find new ways to live together. There are threads we hold. The knowledge that we're not supposed to go it alone. That we need each other and that each person has something to offer. May our truths founded in love and justice guide and support us all. May we do our best each day to speak our truth, and to stand up for others when we must, to be kind to one another, tenderhearted... following the examples that Jesus has put before us. Give us a fresh start.... today and each day, as we strive for clean-hearted living. Amen

Universal Truths (humorous at omniseek.com)

Ketchup makes everything taste better. Except Ketchup
(rljoiner#mindspring.com)

A cat works just as well as trained Psychologist, and gives better advice.
(pshovar#aol.com)

Some people can never finish a.....

30 seconds after permanently deleting/throwing it away/burning it, you need it.
(westley#bigfoot.com)

Few things are as amazing as the amount of effort people will go to in order to annoy others.
(domen.novak#g_kabel.si)

It's possible to find a soulmate on the internet... but not within a 3000 mile radius
(richard#phase.org)

Just because it's a "well known fact" doesn't mean it's true.
(mike#tecc.co.uk)

The two most common elements in the Universe are hydrogen and stupidity
(corsair#rconnect.com)

The best truths invariably come from the sides of mugs that you never remember purchasing.
(Tiberian#ICDC.COM)

When in doubt, you should probably keep it to yourself.
(randomthoughts#usa.net)

Nothing is ever as simple as it first appears
(dlaing#cheerful.com)

The truth is no one knows the truth.
(eric#generation_i.com)