

I am a people watcher! This is really an understatement, I study people! I love to sit and watch people walk and observe their interactions with one another. I am both amazed at people and sometimes extremely disappointed. When I am out at the show or in a store, at a restaurant or with friends, I watch how people interact with one another. I observe their interactions, what they say with their bodies, how they lean into a conversation or lean away, their eyes and sometimes even their words.(unintentionally of course) You can learn a lot about a person by their behavior. When persons go out of their way to be Christ like to others through their actions and their words, I see an immediate transformation in attitude and demeanor. Thomas Mann says, “People’s behavior makes sense if you think about it in terms of their goals, needs and motives.” By observing people and how others react to their behavior, and then incorporating those best behaviors into our lives, I hopefully make the world a little kinder.

Paul’s advice to the community of new believer’s found in Ephesus, at first, looks like a list of rules for the new life of being a Christian. These are his best observations about what behaviors Christians need to embrace as they see to follow Christ. Paul is attempting to answer an urgent question from new believers by listing virtues and duties that mark the transformed community. They have just learned that, because of God’s love for them through Christ, they have been made a new creation, called to new lives. They are to be new creations not only in their personal journeys but also for the transformation of the world! This is good news but it raises a big question for them: Since we are now members of the household of God, how will we know we are living the new life God intends? As we listen to Paul teaching these new believers, we are reminded of what we have been called to in our own baptism; how we might live as new creations. The works Paul describes are not merit badges but, marks of the new life given us in baptism.

That transformation begins with the call to truth. “..Let us speak the truth to our neighbors.” Speaking the truth in love! Jesus did this for the woman at the well!

When we speak the truth we help the community better represent the body of Christ to the world. We do not lie to ourselves because we are members of each other.

“Be angry but do not sin...” We all know the damage that suppressed and denied anger does, and each knows that there is no aggression like passive aggression. The way to deal with anger without sinning begins with dealing with it today. The mischief the unresolved anger can wreak on the community puts it high on the writers list of issues. The reconciling community must practice reconciliation and that begins with naming the anger. Many a pre-marriage counseling session reminds young lovers that one should never go to bed angry because neither individual will sleep and lack of sleep does not bode well for presenting our best self in the morning.

The concern for community that drives the concern regarding stealing. Honesty and hard work are not to preserve property. Former thieves are to invest their time and energy in self-support so that they may be in a position to care for the destitute. Recently, there was a news story about a coffee shop that was opened by convicts upon their release from prison who offered employment to fellow men and women on parole. Each person gave support to the other and offered their service to care for those in their community. A smile, a warm welcome and a cup of good coffee!

We might cheer when thieves are told not to steal and then be surprised when they are told to do some good. Likewise, we can agree when Christians are told to cease speaking evil. What is spoken is to be for the building up, for occasioning grace. There is no one for whom these words do not represent a challenge and opportunity.

Fred Rogers made his mark in the special way he modeled love and acceptance of others. His messages reflect an important part of our faith.

God created humanity in God’s own image,  
in the divine image God created them,  
male and female God created them. (Genesis 1:27, CEB)

Sometimes, however, we seem to forget this about the driver who cut us off on the interstate this morning, the one with whom we vehemently disagree about politics or theology, the neighbor across the street or on the other side of the globe with a different culture and religion, and the person whose experience I simply do not understand. Each one of them is created in the divine image.

The motivation for not grieving the Spirit is organic. Christians are to tell the truth to each other because they are members of each other and because it is the Spirit that seals them. The seal of the spirit is placed on us at our baptism, marking us as Christ's own. We must not reject that which attached us to our identity.

Once again Paul repeats, (lest we did not hear the first time), it is precisely when aggression; bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, slander and malice become a customary path that tremendous effort is required for reconciliation. Be kind and compassionate to one another. In doing so, Christians have the joy to participate in the work of Christ. The practice of kindness draws one away from the hardness of heart and into the life of God. Last night on the news, a young 10 year old attending a Detroit Tigers game caught a foul ball. He proceeded to enjoy the moment but noticed a young 7 year old in front of him who was celebrating his birthday at the game with family and friends. Since he had gotten a ball at a previous game, he ran down and gave the ball to the birthday boy! The smiles on their faces were priceless. Later the boys were interviewed regarding the ball exchange and we learned that the young birthday boy later received a ball again and he decided to share that with a young 3 year old girl who had never gotten a ball. Kindness can be shown at any age!

As community is formed and we join together to be Christ's testimony to the world intimacy will sometimes involve hurt; hence the necessity for forgiveness. No meaningful relationship can survive without it. Jesus was God's love poured out for us. Jesus forgave again and again, modeling kindness and love in unmeasurable amounts – even before folks admitted they needed it! This morning we open ourselves to Christ's presence and answer the call to e his compassion poured out in the world, creating ties that bind us to one another in love.

As God's beloved children, we do not just love God, praise God, worship God, thank God. We also aim to imitate God, minding and then closing the gap between God's behavior and our own. That we are to be imitators of God seems at first like an impossible task. How could we ever imitate perfect knowledge, perfect power, and perfect holiness? We can't for these things, of course. But the scripture says we should strive to imitate God as we walk in love: Jesus' own love. First John 4:16 says, "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them." We can love in this way because we have been loved ourselves by the One who came to bring light and salvation to the world.

We have been loved with the love of forgiveness, but we're also continually loved with the love of healing. We are being changed as we receive grace each and every day. Those who are baptized are called to be imitators of that action, not just in the sanctuaries we find ourselves in, but on the world stage and on the front lines of human relationships. To imitate God, only one thing is needed; love that sacrifices for the good of others. If we get that, we get it all.

May it be so!

Will you pray with me as I offer this poem prayer by Ilma Barayuga-Doherty.

All that I am and all that I have  
Whatever gifts I received I cannot brag  
They are God's grace poured in me  
God loves me so much so that I can be free.  
God's amazing love pours grace and mercy  
God wants us to walk in love generously  
God works in us, through us and with us  
Even if we can't understand, we must trust.