



The Westminster Pulpit

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Had Enough?

A Sermon on Ephesians 4:25 – 5:2

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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.

^{5:1}Therefore 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 Word of the Lord.

Was that the good news? I would think good news would be more popular. The scripture I just read won't fly in this culture. Can you imagine beginning the political debate with the question, "You're running for office. How will you obey the Word of the Lord during this political season? Are you ready to put 'away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.'? Again, how will you obey the Word of the Lord?" That wouldn't make for good television.

In this day and age the good news isn't to be kind. The good news isn't living in love. No. The really good news is when we can bury our enemies. The great news is when we can cut ourselves free from the burdens of others. The wonderful news is when we can be secure. The good news is, "I'm sorry, it's really not my problem."

"Hear the good news!" Our ears are open to anything that will help us survive in a dog-eat-dog world. Give me some good news that will put me first, feed my ego, and keep me from having to help anyone else. I'll vote for that.

On Thursday, I had a long day. It started with my dog jumping into the bed at 4:30 in the morning because he can hear a thunderstorm brewing in Arkansas. He put his golden retriever paw on my cheek to make certain I knew there was a thunderstorm in Arkansas at 4:30 in the morning. "Don't let the sun go down on your anger." What happens when you're angry and the sun isn't even up? But then, how do you get angry at a golden retriever?

So, Thursday just started off as one of those days. The things I wanted to get accomplished, I didn't. The things that needed to be done were stalled. Top that off with contemplation of conversations over issues dividing the Church, and by late afternoon, I was exhausted. I pulled into the garage, and couldn't wait to walk the greenway and listen to the end of my book. Time to decompress. I came into the house and Beth asked, "Have you voted yet?" "No!" I jumped back in the car with Beth and my son in tow, and we went to vote. My day wasn't getting any better.

So, I'm in a foul mood. I'm not doing what I want to do. I arrive at the polling place and there are all these smiling poll watchers. There's nothing in my body language that says, "letting go of bitterness." I want to be on the greenway listening to the last chapter of my book and not voting in some election that you have to vote again in two months from now. Those smiling poll workers looked at me and knew not to raise a conversation. So, they spoke to my son. "Is this your first time voting?" Michael smiled and said "No, second or third, I think." I turned to my son. "How come they didn't ask me that question?" Michael just looked at me like, "You're lucky they just don't shoot you to take you out of your misery." He's right, but still I couldn't snap out of it. I knew I was in a bad mood, and I couldn't do anything about it. The things I want to do, I can't do. The things I don't want to do, I'm doing.

There are smiling poll watchers who are living out the good news, and I'm not voting for it. What I'm saying is that good news isn't widely accepted. Often, what's good news for some, isn't good news for others. When the light comes on, some people have to run for the shadows. The good news may be that the war is over. The bad news may be that the war is over. It depends on what side you're on.

David's runaway son was Absalom. He was the boy who thought good news was staging a coup against your own dad. He thought good news was running your dad out of the palace and out of town. He thought the good news was being the one in charge. None of that "putting away falsehood" or being "tenderhearted." Well, where our story picked up, was when David's army lured Absalom's army into a trap. We heard how David waited for word on the battle. "How was the battle going?" And the sentinel said, "Look here comes a messenger, and he is coming with good news." Then the sentinel said, "See another man running alone, he is also bringing good news." David said, "Oh he's a good man, and comes with good news." Hear the good news! "All is well! Blessed by the Lord God who rescued you from all who rose up against you." The King said, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" Hear the good news! "May all who rise up to do you harm, be like that young man." And David wept over the good news. The war is over, and the bad news? The war is over. "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you. O Absalom my son, my son!"

It reminds me of Timothy McVey's father. You remember Timothy McVey. He was the young man who blew up the federal building in Oklahoma City. When Timothy was getting ready to be executed, his father was on one of the morning programs and said, "I don't know what happened to Timothy. He's not the Timothy I knew. I cannot condone anything he did, but I still love my son." I wonder if God's love is anything like that, because it sounds like David's was.

I remember the man who prayed that his mother would die. I know that sounds awful, but she was in so much pain. She had lost her memory, and was in a nursing home. She just kept holding on. The good news would be if she would just die. She died, he wept. He got what he prayed for. It was good news! He said, "I don't know why I'm crying." I replied, "You love your mother." He said, "When I was caring for my mother, I wish I could have changed places. I never wanted to see her in so much pain." "Would I have died, instead of you."

Good news can be such hard news, tough news, sad news. The church is mindful of this, even on the days of our most joyous occasions. The wedding ceremony knows that good news brings with it the sad news. "I will love you in joy..." Yes. But, "...I will also love you in sorrow." "I will love you in health..." Yes. But, "...I will love you in sickness." "I will love you in plenty..." Yes. But, "...I will love you in want." The church knows that good news encompasses all of life. Life is as high as it is low. The good news is that you laugh on your happiest day. The good news is when you've had enough of your spouse's attitude, and now you have to conjure up just a little more love to deal with it. The good news is also when you can't do it anymore. The good news is when after you've been abused and the divorce papers are signed, there exists a community that is so sad to hear about your divorce, a community that understands and listens. The good news comes at the first taste of sweetness over bitterness. The good news is when you can begin to trust again to love again. Good news isn't easy, and it isn't fun!

I remember Nathan from my youth group, a great kid, and full of life. He was under the watchful eye of his parents, and if he was my kid, I'd watch him, too. At one youth group meeting, we were talking about the future, and Nathan had his life all worked out. He said, "I'm going to go to college, and I'm going to have fun. I'm not going to worry about what God thinks, what my parents think, or what other people think. I'm going to have fun. Then, when I'm thirty, I'll get married, come back to church, and be miserable." I think he was joking. But he was wise enough to know that good news is when you can reject the good news. "I'm going to have fun." And he knew the real "Good News" comes with a burden. You cannot live your life at the expense of others.

Today we baptize a baby. We enjoy. We may text during the sermon, but when the baptism happens, you put the phone away. We love this moment. It is what we live for. It's like what old Simeon lived for. Do you remember when he was handed that little baby Jesus? Simeon held the child in his arms, and praised the Lord saying, "I'm free to go now Lord. For my eyes have seen your salvation." Good news! Then, Simeon handed that child back over to his mother and said, "This child is destined for the falling of many, and to be a sign to be opposed. And a sword, a sword Mary, will pierce your heart, too." It's supposed to be good news, but "Good News" comes with a price. Your baby has to die. "Good News" comes with a sacrifice. You don't get to live life your way. You have to live it for God and for others.

This week we had another shooting in a theater. The only good thing in this news of the day came from the man who had suffered a wound from the hatchet yielded by the crazed attacker. He said, "Pray for that man and his family. Pray for that man and his family." Sanest thing I heard. I hold on to these things.

Back in May, I invited you to come forward to the table with your prayers, and you came up to the sound of bag pipes with your prayers for the Church. I have those prayers and on my bad days when I worry about the Church, I go to those prayers and read them. I hear your prayers.

“I pray in thanksgiving for the way this church has made me feel welcomed and included since moving to Nashville last summer.” One card reads, “I pray that the member of the church realize and appreciate the blessings that God gives us, and that we return those blessings through mission and demonstrating God’s love in our community.” Another card reads, “May we be not only welcoming but truly inclusive to all who gather with us.” And then, “I pray that Westminster continues to wrap its arms around each and every member of this diverse congregation and guide and nurture them along their Christian journey. May peace come to this world. Amen.”

These are your prayers. My hunch is that we are people who can’t get enough of the “Good News.” We know that the really “Good News” comes at a price – the cross. It demands our lives. Come let us live out the Word. It is the Good News!

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