

August 9 2015

**Scripture Lessons ~**

*Psalms 34*

*Ephesians 4:25-5:2*

**Sermon**     *Challenging Words of Encouragement*

I am very happy to be able to share and worship with you in the absence of Pastor Russ this morning. I am the type of person that sometimes needs somebody to give me restrictions and so when I was asked to preach, I don't know if your tradition is to give the lectionary readings or not so I went with the Ephesians scripture this morning. It is a wonderfully wise word from the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians church. And easily in these few sentences, one could preach, I am sure, a dozen sermons; a sermon on putting away falsehood; a sermon on being real; sermons on dealing constructively with anger or sermons on not stealing and what are the implications; how we feel sometimes and be aware or sharing with the need; and using words to tear down someone ; sermons on the Holy Spirit; being kind; a reflection of God's nature and forgiveness as God has forgiven us; putting things beyond us-how do you put bitterness, wrath, and anger and malice beyond us; that would be a sermon all by its self. Being imitators of God that's a pretty tall order and that would take a few sermons, I think; and sermons on living in the love of Christ and many more. We don't have time for that this morning. I won't even attempt.

I want to focus on verses 26 and 27. Be angry but don't let the sun set on your anger; do not give opportunity to the devil. I am going to weave that thought into some of my journey I took in the past seven or eight months. Some of you are aware and some of you were praying for me when I was in the hospital for about 42 days starting about the middle of December right after I had finished my work with our church. It was heart surgery, a serious one. Open heart is always serious. And there was a valve issue and an aneurism that the doctors needed to address before it was too late. So I scheduled that and had it done. I didn't recover the first day very well and the following day I wasn't coming out of it so the doctor suspected something had happened where the blood collects around the heart and prevents it from beating properly. So the doctor went back in and opened me up again. They corrected that but then I went into a coma, that included organ failures and the shutting down of the liver. It was pretty serious. The doctor said to my family that I might not make it, but lo and behold a number of days later around Christmas I began to revive and a few days later came out of the coma and then began the long way, back getting the systems back to working. But in order to maintain the core areas of the body the blood had to be restricted to the legs and

that's why I had an amputation of the left leg. But as you can see I am doing pretty good now, thanks to lots of prayers and good medicine.

While I was in the hospital someone said to me, "I would be angry if I were you." I thought about that and said, "You know, yes, but who would I be angry at." He said, "I don't know, God?" "No," I said, "I can see how people get angry at God over something but you never know when you get in these situations how it is going to be for you. I wasn't in that place I somehow didn't believe that God was somehow to blame for a situation such as this." "I can certainly understand being angry with God if it is one of the children who is suffering. In that situation being angry makes a lot of sense and a person could feel angry.

Paul warns us to be careful with our anger. It is a powerful thing. And many of us are used to the Bible and society with its dos and don'ts. The Bible particularly is full of don'ts. The Old Testament has over 600 dos and don'ts. And we are told by our culture, don't be rude, don't cut in line, don't in public, don't be a showoff, don't show the way you feel, don't use bad words, don't jump up, and most of those are good don'ts. Why? But one that is not wise is, don't feel the way you do. If you feel angry then it is better to name it and bring it out in the open that is what Paul said. Be angry but don't let the sun set down on it. Anger is a powerful emotion that all of us feel, some of us more than others. And what do we do with it? We can hurt people with it. We can hurt ourselves with it.

At the same time it is very important emotion. It is a God-given emotion. And there are times certainly when we need to be angry about and there are others that we should let go. And how do we make those choices? All of us have little irritations; the spouse forgets to pick up the milk at the store. Things like that. How many times do they happen to us? Those are the things that Paul certainly says, let go, deal with and they will be gone. They happen many times throughout the week, I suspect.

But there are also the big things that we need to be angry about in a good way to just name a few. There are so many problems in our world that we should be angry about. Anger tells us we care. If you are not angry you don't really care. God wants us to care about things like---3 point 1 million children die from malnutrition we should be angry about that. There is a problem with the atmosphere and we humans are causing it. It is getting alarming high and all of us will suffer, we should be angry about that. Things are not being done about it we are not rowing our boats in the same direction.

In 2009, 95% of income gains were made by 1% of the US population. We should be concerned about that if not angry because that anger will propels us to address that and to work for constructive relief.

But anger is complex and this is where the skit comes in. First- there is anger over loss, but the anger underneath is really about the loss and grief and

sadness and that's the real issue. It was an accident and accidents happen. The second one has that loss and grief too it and the anger but there is a complexity of emotions involved because of the motive behind , there's betrayal, there is confusion, outrage, humiliation and in all those things and so there is a lot of layers to our anger sometimes and particularly if malice is involved. We know that anger has its place. We are manipulated being angry and sometimes that manipulation comes through here fear. We all have the sense that it is getting bad out there. People are on edge. They are fearful. They are angry. The question is, are they publically angry? Are they publically responding in a Christian loving, constructive redemptive way? Are they able to recognize that under their anger there is probably a lot of pieces, the undertone of racism, the undertone of gender issues and fear? The undertone of that fear and anger over we could go on and on the fears that are masked by the anger that the people fear. Anger and fear are not constructive and we often are giving the devil more territory than should be. Sometimes we should be angry because we care.

When I was lying in the hospital in ICU on the main floor I calculate the bill was a quarter and half a million dollars just to keep this middle aged guy on the planet for another few decades, if I am lucky. But I remembered that in 2007 we were as a family in Africa and a woman knocked at the door of the clinic and asked for a \$5.00 loan so she could take her daughter to get malaria medicine which would relive her malaria. Now as I was laying there in the hospital I was thinking that half million dollars could buy a 100 thousand malaria pills and I am thinking is that fair? Should I be angry about that? I wasn't angry but it does seem to be an issue and I realize a great privilege that is humbling as well as saying could this be evil? Could we try something to make it equal given the opportunity? And I expect it would be true if I could have made that switch and taken that big chunk of money and x number of malaria treatments that would have likely saved dozens if not hundreds of lives, I would have gladly step in and to allow that to happen if I could. We are looking at a couple more decades in the light of eternity. You know my family sadness over the loss of me in the eyes of God is no different from the sadness of other families because they can't afford a \$5.00 pill treatment. It is perplexing isn't it? How can we address that? While I was lying in the hospital, I also realized how fortunate I am I have a loving spouse who happens to be a nurse. And we happen to live about one mile away from a hospital, not a small town hospital but a medical center, a really good equipped for major heart procedures. I have a spouse and a job with flexible hours and benefits. I have been able to provide for my family all those things but so many people don't. Thanks to the Affordable Care, whatever you might think of it, it does allow people to have insurance. But even then I think of someone who may t work at MacDonald's half time in Newport and they get stricken with the same problem or a spouse, a loved

one or a child that needs long term help over in Spokane and their job doesn't provide for that and they don't have an advocate who a nurse and they have to go back and forth and their insurance may not be adequate. I think of those things. Should we be angry about it maybe? We should. I think that is one of the things that the gospel is talking about. Everyone should have equal access to what they need. No one should be left behind. It is the Biblical idea of Salome. Salome is that word that means thriving, prosperity, not just to survive. Surviving is about fear. Fairness is about the Gospel. There are a lot of angry, fearful people today and they put their anger in the wrong place--- stockpiling of weapons about surviving not about thriving or about the common good we are all in the same boat together railing against others. The less don't have a voice or a strong voice or power or don't have power. The common response of those at the lower end of society is railing that anger, against those who have power, and could make a difference or change. Unfortunately, there is a tendency to rail again those that are even lower. That's the kind of sin that Paul says, don't that angry-don't let the devil have the devil's way. We are about thriving not about surviving and it always has to be the example of Jesus and that example is the willingness to sacrifice and to respond in the most non-violent way possible. The Mennonites, the UCC, the Seven Day Adventist, the Methodist, the Assemblies of God churches, are doing in their own way things to bring about thriving. And they are taking those things that they could be angry about and offering to God and doing some better ways. It could be as small as making comforts for the misplaced neighbors, or putting together relief packages, or rebuilding houses in disaster , or crafting letters or revolutions activities or lobbying , sometimes things about feeling better about ourselves but they are still attempts to give voice to the issues that need to be addressed or ecumenical or interface gatherings where dialog happens or victim offender reconciliation programs for those who have been victims and those who have been victimizers come together. Sometimes even taking things to the streets to be heard for the common good can be a redemptive thing to get people's attention as long in a positive spirit and is non-violent. Paul warns us not to let anger to lead us into sin personally or collectively.

70 years ago to this day the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki estimated 70 thousand died this is not my way in casting blame for that. The blame belongs to the whole of humanity. We also know Nagasaki happened because over 4 years prior there was an unprovoked attack-- Pearl Harbor. Both were sins the result of fear and anger and the result was suffering.

There is that unique little story about the girl who survived Hiroshima, she made a thousand cranes or attempted because she received radiation. Her desire the crane would be a symbol of peace. I don't have a crane but I have this little box I will put it on the pulpit in remembrance of this event at Nagasaki. It is an origami

box. I marvel at it. It was made by an escape student, a friend of my sister. I marvel at this giraffe, this rhinoceros this elephant, this deer, lion, an ostrich and others. I marvel at that. I can't even the big ones, or a box. Why did I bring a little origami because it is cool, because it symbolizes to me and am amazed that somebody this beautiful art with their hands as we well should be with our ability as human beings to create an atomic weapon? We should be more amazed about human creativity and possibilities, potential and creating beauty, that is where we should be focusing our attention as Christians; because the opposite is to take our possibilities, our intelligence, and our ability to use them for destruction.

In Deuteronomy 30 we are given the choice the Lord said, "I will bless you if you follow in my way you will thrive. I offer to you a blessing and cursing; life or death; choose life. This is our charge. In Paul's letter he saying it in another way, be kind and, compassioned, forgiving each other just as Christ forgave you. Be imitators of God, love children and live a life of love just as Christ loved us and gave himself up as a fragrant offering and in sacrifice. Be that our focus. May God transform our anger and any of our emotions and use us for the good of the Gospels of Christ. Amen