

Psalm 34:1-8
Ephesians 4:25-5:2

“Overheard at Wendy’s”

My preferred hamburgers are at Wendy’s. Several weeks ago I was enjoying my favorite. It’s a #2. A double burger with lettuce, tomato, onion and mustard.

Several people had slipped into a booth behind me. It was a family. Perhaps not. They were behind me. But these seemed to be two adults and a couple of teens. They were talking about some project one teen was working on. She was explaining a plan she had for an event. Slowly, the conversation became heated. An argument right there in Wendy’s. Words flew. Thankfully no fries or drinks sailed.

But then this abrasive exchange ...

You can’t possibly do that.
That will never work.
You’re just plain stupid.

Has something like that ever been said about you? You were burning with a new idea. At work ... at home ... in school. It’s powerful and exciting ... just waiting to be tried. Now you need some feedback/you hope it’s positive ... offering some words of encouragement.

But instead, what do you receive? ...

“That will never work.
“Things don’t work that way.
”That’s unrealistic. Stupid. You’re stupid!
“Just finish your burger and fries and let’s get
out of here.”

But what in the world does that have to do with what Paul, a follower of Jesus, writes to Christians living in the city of Ephesus over 2000 years ago?

And above all, what does it have to do with us as 21st century Americans ...

trying to negotiate through brambles and briars,
 squabbles and put-downs, terror and fear,
 alarm and more bad news,
 a seeming break-through with Iran ...
 or is that really a break-down that
 will only escalate tension and
 dread?

Well, every twice and a while I remind you – and I remind myself
 -- **that we are members of the body of Christ.** And that the
 way Jesus is alive today is in and through his body – the church.
Alive through you and me. Members of the body. And to be cut
 off from the body we lose strength and wither.

The body is meant to be together – to work together – pray
 together – to forgive one another.

To function in harmony.

And so Paul writes to his friends in Ephesus, **“Speak the truth
 to your neighbors, for we are members of one another.”**

Look, we do not lie to ourselves, do we? So “because we are
 members of one other, let us be as truthful with each other as we
 are with ourselves.

So ok, those people challenging one another at Wendy’s might
 argue ... “We were simply telling her the truth. “People need to
 face-up to the truth.” “If we don’t tell her where she is wrong, who
 will tell her? “We’re her friends. “Or we’re her family and we owe
 it to her to set her right.”

But Paul insists ... Speak the truth to our neighbors...our friends
 ... our family because we are **members** of one another.

We are that close. So we respect one another. We value
 the gifts of one another.

She is worth listening to, closely. Responding to,
gently.

The opportunity is not to see who can outshout
 the other or be the biggest bully ...

But who will walk alongside another. Placing
 ourselves in the shoes of another.

One approach I especially like about Girl Scouts is found in the
 Girl Scout law ... “To be a sister to every Girl Scout” – and that’s
 a full dress rehearsal for how to live every day/with every person.

Then Paul, follower of Jesus, writes ... **“Be angry.”** Now there’s a surprise. A twist. I recall being told, **“Don’t be angry.”**

It is said that Amazon.com lists more than 40,000 religious book titles that touch on the subject of “anger.”

Certainly that number testifies to the level of difficulty we have with anger.

Anger bottled-up and anger denied has a corrosive impact on us.

And anger turned inward upon ourselves festers and too often turns into depression.

“Be angry” is not a command, from Paul, but it acknowledges that anger will always be around.

The way to deal with anger, without sinning, is to deal with it this day. **Before sundown.** Don’t allow anger to gnaw and embitter. Today, before sundown, acknowledge it, make amends, ask forgiveness, and receive mercy.

The demonic mischief that anger **inflict**_[u1]s on a community – a marriage -- a family – a church puts it high on Paul’s list of thorny issues. Nothing undermines the life of a beloved community or a treasured friendship more than festering anger.

Reflecting on that incident at Wendy’s, it seemed to be so far out of proportion to the conversation that had been going on. But outbursts like that happen when there’s a load of pent-up anger. Days ... perhaps months of perceived slights, and disrespectful acts, and anger grows. So Paul instructs, **“Be Angry ... Yes. That’s ok. But don’t let the sun go down on your anger.”**

Let’s press forward with Paul’s wise ways for living and growing. **“Thieves must give up stealing.”** We all know that! Amen! But why stop stealing? Why a radical change of behavior? For Paul, It’s not to preserve the sanctity of private property.

Rather, thieves are to invest their time and energy in supporting themselves so that they will be able to join the community’s care for the poor.

Look, the work ethic we cherish so much is transformed into participating in Jesus’ ministry – sharing in Jesus’ work for others ... especially for the destitute.

Again, listen to Paul; **“Don’t let evil talk come out of your mouths.”** A saying goes, “Actions speak louder than words,” But Paul urges us to recognize that words, also, are quite powerful. Words can help and heal. But words can also tear down and rip apart. **Let no evil come out of your month. Only that which communicates grace to the hearers.** So **think** before you speak. And you need not speak so often. Words do matter because they can either build-up or destroy relationships; words can strengthen or end friendships; words can renew or weaken a church.

Now, a moment for taking stock ... of reflecting on our own life ... the traps we have fallen into ... the ways that lead people to say, or indeed we say to ourselves and tend to dismiss our hurtful ways ... “Oh, that’s just Bob being Bob.” Paul urges, **Put away all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice.**

Put Away ... like you take off some old clothes ... you have worn them for so long, faded and threadbare ... but they have become so comfortable ... but not flattering ... you fail to notice the poor fit.

Put off bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and wrangling and slander and malice. They simply are not becoming to you. They are not in Jesus’ wardrobe, I guarantee that. So they should not be in ours, either.

And put on kindness ... be kind to one another. Tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God, in Jesus Christ has forgiven you.

And now the bold statement designed to grab our attention and make certain our commitment ...

Yes, it’s a command. **THEREFORE, be imitators of God.**

Imitating God means putting our focus on the actions that flow from God’s character.

Imitating God means letting God’s way of love flow through you.

Imitating God means letting forgiveness and mercy pour from your heart.

Imitating God means letting justice roll on like a river and righteousness like an always flowing stream.

Overheard at Wendy's –
 Overheard at home –
 Overheard at school – at work –
 Overheard at church.

THESE ARE SPECIAL WORDS -

**Engrave them on your hearts/in your mind/
 I'm going to attach them to our refrigerator door ...
 That's a place I often go:**

LET'S REPEAT THEM TOGETHER

Speak the truth to your neighbors, for we are members of one another.

Be angry, but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.

Thieves, give up stealing; rather, labor and work honestly with your own hands so as to have something to share with the needy.

Don't let 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. Put away all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice.

And be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

THEREFORE, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us.

AND THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST BE WITH YOU ... THIS DAY ... AND FOREVER.

