

Now I speak in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Regulars will know that at the moment we're looking in our sermons at the epistle readings from the Book of Ephesians, and the sermon today forms something of a pair, which the last sermon I gave two weeks ago. If you were here then, you'll have heard me talking about a beautiful passage in the previous chapter in that epistle from Ephesians where St. Paul is talking about God's love for each one of us, the love, he says, that "surpasses knowledge". And he was encouraging his readers to be rooted and grounded in that love. And our epistle today from Ephesians, the next chapter is also about love, but in this part of the letter, Paul's not writing so much about God's love for us, but our love for others.

He says that we're to "live in love as Christ loved us". A beautiful phrase. We're to live in love. Other translations had it as we're to walk in love. We who are loved by God need to learn to love others. We're all created in the image of God, and when we live in love, we become imitators of God, Paul says. And the need for those who know God's love to share that love with our neighbor is deeply embedded in scripture. Paul says in another of his epistles, Galatians, "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command. Love your neighbor as yourself."

In that great chapter in 1 Corinthians, which we often hear at weddings, Paul writes that, "The greatest gift is love, without which we're simply a noisy nuisance." And then there's John. He writes, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother or sister, he's a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother or sister whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command, whoever loves God must also love his brother or sister." Loving your neighbor, Jesus Himself said, is the greatest commandment. In His last words to His disciples, He said, giving them a new commandment, "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All people will know that you are My disciples if you love one another."

So that's pretty clear. We're called to love, but not under our own steam, drawing on our own resources. In planning this service, I asked Walter, who draws up

the bulletin, to extend the reading because in the lectionary it begins at verse 25 with the phrase "put away falsehoods". But I asked Walter to include the couple of verses before that to act as an introduction because I wanted to include that reminder that we have put away our old self and put on the renewed new self.

Loving our neighbor is much easier said than done and we can't do it in our own strength. We need to draw on God's renewing Spirit to help us to do that. In the previous chapter, Paul writes, "I pray that according to the riches of God's glory, He may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through His Spirit." It's the Spirit's power we're looking to draw on to give us the resources to love as we want to love, to walk in love as we want to walk. We're looking to share the riches of God's glory. Without that little introduction and those extra verses, I feel that the passage could be read as just sort of an encouragement to live a good and worthy life, almost could read like a passage from a self-help book or self-improvement book, but we're not into that kind of self-help or self-improvement here. What we open ourselves up to in church is being transformed by God's Spirit and living in love by His power, not relying solely on our own resources, but looking to God's transforming power.

And in this passage, Paul spells out what living in love looks like, and it's a very practical section and there's so much I could draw out, but I'm just going to limit myself to three things, three characteristics Paul talks about here as living in love.

Firstly, those who live in love have learned how to handle their anger. The new life we have in Christ, it's not some otherworldly, hopefully idealistic, life in which nobody gets angry or there's no unhelpful emotions, where there's no cross words. Rather, it's a way of life in which anger is dealt with lovingly. "Be angry," St. Paul says, "but do not sin." He knows that we all get angry. We'll get angry in our new life, in the spirit, and anger can lead us to do foolish things that we regret.

I've been told a story. It may or may not be true, but I'm telling it anyway. It's about a woman wrestling with a problem we all know at this time of year, trying to find a parking space in La Jolla Shores. And this woman, she had that feeling, that feeling of

elation that we have when we see a parking space down there. And she got herself ready to back in and some young guy in a flashy car behind her just snuck in and took the parking space first. And she said to him, she wound the window down and said, "Look, what are you doing? I saw that first. That was my parking space." And he just laughed and said, "Well, I did it because I'm young and quick." And he kept on walking. But he did turn round when he heard the clanging sound of crashing metal, turn round to see the woman repeatedly bashing into his car. He said, "What are you doing?" She said, "Well, I'm doing that because I'm old and rich."

"Be angry," Paul says, "but do not sin." Then he gives a fantastic piece of advice. "Do not let the sun go down on your anger." I think our lives, our families, our churches would be so different if we just followed that simple piece of advice, not letting the sun go down on our anger. There's a national park ranger in British Columbia who has on his wall two huge sets of antlers enmeshed together. Two bull moose began fighting, their antlers locked, and they couldn't get free. So, they died together, entangled. Their anger killed them. They literally couldn't let go of their anger. Let's not hold onto our anger. Don't let the sun go down on your anger. Or as I once heard a Pentecostal preacher say, much more enthusiastically than me, "Don't curse it, don't nurse it, don't rehearse it, and God will disperse it, and He will reverse it."

The second characteristic of walking in love is forgiveness. Forgiveness is an unnatural act. It always goes against the grain because it always has a sense of somebody getting away with something, and we don't like that. The natural thing always is not to forgive. I know this is an extreme example, but I did read in an English paper about two sisters who lived together, fell out, couldn't forgive each other, and so one of them took a piece of chalk and just went down the middle of the house drawing a line. And for decades, they never crossed that line because they couldn't forgive. As the poet W.H. Auden said, "I and the public know what all school children learn, that to whom evil is done, do evil in return." The law of nature admits no forgiveness.

Do squirrels forgive cats for chasing them up trees?
Do dolphins forgive sharks for eating their

playmates? No, course not. It's a dog-eat-dog world, not a dog-forgive-dog world. "But," says St. Paul, "Your new life in the Spirit is different, different to the natural order. Part of putting off the old self is learning to forgive." And why do we forgive? Well, there are many reasons. Many sermons could be taken up answering that question, but St. Paul just gives one lesson here. He says, "Forgive one another as God in Christ has forgiven you." We who know ourselves to be a forgiven people must in turn be a forgiving people.

The new life we are called to live isn't simply about being nice to one another. It's not about doing the right thing to earn God's favor. It's about responding to the God who has reached out to us in Jesus Christ. He loved us before we could do anything to earn that affection. "He died for us," St. Paul says, "whilst we were yet sinners." This new life we live in the power of the Spirit is our response to the love that God has shown us in Christ Jesus.

And the final characteristic of living in love which I'll mention is something that's much needed, kindness. We're called to be kind, Paul says, to one another. He says, "Be kind and tender-hearted to one another." Jeff Bezos, the boss of Amazon, was 10 years old when he saw an advert on television, one of those public health ones, which said how much life was lost with every cigarette that a person smoked. I think it was two minutes. So, he worked out that his grandmother, who he was staying with, had shortened her life by 16 years with her smoking. So he told her, and not surprisingly, she was upset and she burst into tears. And his grandfather came to him. He wasn't angry, he wasn't upset with him, didn't try to punish him. He simply said to him something that stayed with him. He said, "You'll learn one day that it's much harder to be kind than to be clever." And we're to be kind. We're to be kind to one another.

So, we've seen three characteristics of living in love. Three characteristics that we can practice in our homes, in our workplaces, in our families, in our church. Being angry but not sinning, being forgiving, and being kind. May God by His Spirit enable us to live His way and to walk in love. Amen.