

I want to say a few words about that reading we've just heard from St. Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus. We've been looking at that great book over the last few weeks, and you may have noticed, if you've been with us from previous weeks, that the letter now has taken a turn. He's gone from the more theological and abstract passages that he had at the beginning of the letter; now, things have taken a more practical and pastoral turn. And this is a very good reading to have at a baptism service, which I'm pleased about because, when I preach this sermon later on, there are going to be two baptisms in the service.

I realize that it could all sound as if St. Paul is simply moralizing here and telling people how to behave. And there's much in this passage that could be found in other writings of the time from the ancient world. What's original and different about St. Paul is the motivation that he gives for behaving in a certain way. The framework for his whole ethical instruction is baptism.

In the verse before where our reading begins, Paul writes this: "Put away your former way of life, your old self, and be renewed, being clothed with the new self." Paul constantly draws the contrast in his writings between the old life and the new life in Christ Jesus that we enjoy as Christians. And baptism is the beginning of that new life. It's a shift from heading one way, that St. Paul would call the way of the flesh, the way that leads to death, to going a different way, following Jesus in the way of the Spirit. Baptism is a turning towards Jesus Christ, seeking to walk his way. It's being put on a path that points in a certain direction. That's the background and the context to what Paul is saying here.

So, we're not to understand this passage as simply being how to be nice to one another. Paul is saying, "This is what your new life should look like," that those people who've been baptized, who are walking this way, this is the kind of life they should be living, with these characteristics. Through baptism, we're grafted into the body of Christ, and we become God's redeemed people. As he says in

this passage, we've been marked in baptism with the seal of God's Holy Spirit. We're now to live a life lived in love, rooted and grounded in love. We live in love as we're imitating the one who loved us, and who spared nothing in his demonstration of that love for each one of us.

So, let me pick out three characteristics of this new life, of the new way that we're called to follow. The first is that this is not a life with no cross words; it's not an otherworldly, hopelessly idealistic kind of life. "Be angry," St. Paul says, "but do not sin." St. Paul knows that each of us get angry, and when we're angry, we can do foolish things. I've been told this story, it may be apocryphal, I don't know, but I think it bears repeating either way. It's a story about a woman who was driving around La Jolla shores, looking for a parking space. And at this time of year, that's nigh-on impossible, but she saw one. And she was just reversing, backing up into this parking space which she'd spotted, and a young man with a very small, sporty little car just nipped in and took the place ahead of her.

And she called out and she said, "I found that spot first. What gives you the right just to push in and take it?" The young man laughed and said, "Because I'm young and quick." With that, he walked off. But he soon turned round when he heard the hideous sound of metal on metal and two cars colliding into one another. And he saw the woman who he'd just spoken to ramming her car into his car in the parking space. He said, "Hold on, what are you doing?" She caught his eye and said, "That's because I'm old and rich."

"Be angry," Paul says, "but do not sin." Don't let anger get the better of you. And then he gives this fantastic piece of advice. "Do not let the sun go down on your anger." I think our lives, all of our lives, in our families, in our workplaces, in our churches, would be much more different and much better if we practiced that advice. Do not let the sun go down on your anger. There's a park ranger in British Columbia who has mounted on his wall two sets of huge antlers joined together. Evidently, two bull moose began fighting, their antlers

became locked and they couldn't get free, and they both died. They couldn't let go, literally, of their anger. Let's not hold on to it. Don't let the sun go down on your anger, or to put it another way, don't curse it, don't nurse it, don't rehearse it, but disperse it and God will reverse it.

The second characteristic of this new life is forgiveness. Forgiveness is an unnatural act. It always goes against the grain, as there's always an element of somebody seeming to get away with it. The natural thing to do is not to forgive. I know this is an extreme example, but I read about two elderly sisters in England who fell out, and their way of resolving the situation, carrying on living together, was that they took a piece of chalk and just drew a line down the middle of the house, through every room, and never crossed the line.

As the poet W.H. Auden said, "I and the public know what all schoolchildren learn, that to whom evil is done do evil in return." The law of nature admits no forgiveness. "But," says St. Paul, "your new life in the Spirit is different." Part of putting off the old ways is learning to forgive. Why do we forgive? Well, there are a number of reasons, but let me just offer one here that St. Paul himself declares. "Forgive one another as God in Christ has forgiven you." We are a forgiven people, so we're called to be a forgiving people.

The final characteristic that I'll mention that Paul outlines here is kindness. We're called to be kind to one another. Paul says, "Be kind and tenderhearted to one another." Jeff Bezos, who's recently been in space, the Amazon founder, was 10 years old when he saw a commercial on television that said every puff of a cigarette, every cigarette you smoke, took two minutes off your life. He was always very good at math, so he began adding up how many minutes his long-time smoking grandmother had lost to smoking, how many years she would lose. And he took great pride in announcing to her that she would lose 16 years of her life because she'd been smoking so much, and she started to cry. And her husband, Jeff Bezos's grandfather, took him to one side. He wasn't angry; he didn't attempt to punish

him for upsetting his wife. He simply said, "You'll learn one day that it is much harder to be kind than clever." And we're all called to be kind.

So, three characteristics of the new life that we have in Christ, three characteristics that are to be practiced at home, wherever we spend our time, and in the church: being angry but not sinning, being forgiving, and being kind. So, may God by his Spirit help us to live according to his ways. Amen.