

**The Reverend Julie Wells Blythe
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**Be Christ to One Another
Ephesians 4:25-5:2**

I don't know about you, but I go through my life, believing in God, believing in Jesus and the Holy Spirit, trying to live a good life and do what I think God would want me to do. I have often said that I feel that part of my call is to help people understand that pastors are regular people, that we are human, that we make mistakes and say the wrong things but we, like all who are not pastors, are just trying to be good people and to live in the way that we believe God has called us to live. And then I read a passage like the one that was in the lectionary for today and which we just heard. This is tough stuff we are being asked to do. It starts out sounding fairly easy – it shouldn't be too hard to tell the truth to my neighbor. Then we run immediately into that verse which has become somewhat cliché – “Be angry but do not sin, do not let the sun go down on your anger.” O.K., this one is tougher than the first – but at least it acknowledges that we will get angry – the question is – what will we do with the anger? Then there is the verse about those who steal - they must not do it any longer but must do something useful with their hands to help those in need. On the surface, we are practically off the hook with this one. I doubt that many of us think of ourselves as thieves.

We read on to learn that our talk should not be unwholesome but should build up those who hear us speak – and it should be what they need to hear – not necessarily what we feel we need to say. Ralph Martin, author of the *Interpretation* commentary on Ephesians, summarizes this part of our scripture reading with these words:

Living in the network of new social relationship, as being-in-Christ, entails some down to earth behavior patterns, spelled out in Ephesians 4:25-31. The patterns include love of truth; honest purpose in daily work, with an altruistic concern for others in need; sincere speech which has no truck with falsehood, anger, gossip, or rotten talk; and a recognition that we are not our own because of the Spirit's “seal” – a mark of ownership and protection in biblical religion and contemporary business practice. (*Interpretation: A Bible-Commentary for Teaching and Preaching-Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon*,_Ralph P. Martin, John Knox Press, Louisville, KY. 1991. p. 60.)

The passage continues and near the end the rules for this new life get even harder. We are called to get rid of ALL bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander and EVERY form of malice. We all have things in our lives that can bring out bitterness and anger. Someone hurts us or leaves us. A loved one dies. A colleague or friend treats us unfairly in the workplace or school. Someone cuts us off in traffic at the end of a day when everything that could go wrong has. We are supposed to get rid of all our anger, rage, and bitterness. Why? Because we are Christian. How are we supposed to behave? The author goes on to tell us. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

When I was in seminary, one of the things we learned early on in preaching class was to avoid always talking about the original language and going into long explanations about that. After being ordained for three years, I am about to share my first direct translation issue with you. It's not long or complicated but I think it is very cool and very informative about where this passage leads us. Where it has been translated "be kind to one another" the Greek word translated as kind is "Chrestoï". In Greek, this is an auditory pun on the word for Christ. So, this would have been heard in the Greek as "Be Christ to one another."

I saw this lived out time after time on the mission trip that 27 of us took in July. I saw it in how the bus driver was treated when the bus broke down. I saw it in how the adults and teenagers cared for one another. I saw it in all of the hard work that was done in North Minneapolis by our group and the other groups that had traveled there to help. None of that is a big surprise – after all – we were on a mission trip.

I talked about Denise, Femi and Lakan when we did the mission trip report. I would like to remind you of their story now. Lakan and Femi are the twenty year old twin sons of Denise who was the resident that my crew did work for. They live in a neighborhood where gangs and violence can be found almost outside their door and always within a few blocks. Lakan and Femi were both healthy babies until they were four months old. At that time, Femi suffered a SIDS episode. Fortunately, he was in bed with his mom at the time and she caught it, got help and Femi survived. But he was without oxygen long enough that he was left with severe mental and physical deficits. Femi has cerebral palsy, is wheelchair bound, and is unable to communicate verbally. He must be tube fed. He is incontinent. He requires care whenever he is awake. He goes to a special school. He likes cartoons. He also has one of the most beautiful smiles I have ever seen.

Femi is cared for primarily by his mother and brother. He also has an older sister who is away at college. Denise makes all of Femi's food by hand, cooks it and then blends it up so he can have good nutrition through his tube. She works full time and cares for Femi. She is a devoted Christian who goes on a mission trip herself every year. She lives being Christ to others every day of her life.

Lakan is Femi's twin brother. He could be out partying with friends, or hanging out at home or going to school or any of a number of things that would serve his purposes and his needs. Instead he works, and when he is not working, he is home, helping to care for his brother. Lakan feeds Femi, changes him, dresses him, sits on the deck with him and talks to him. He gets him to the bus in the morning. He watches TV with him. And he does all of this with a love and tenderness that I don't think I have ever seen anyone show to another human being. I said when we did the mission trip report, and I say it again now - we are lucky if once in our lives we meet someone who is truly a holy person. I have been blessed in my life to meet two. One of them is Lakan. His calm, beautiful, accepting care for his brother is one of the most holy things I have ever had the honor to witness.

Jesus was holy because he was God's son. He was holy because he did what God required of him. He was holy because he was not afraid to touch the dirty, to help the afflicted, to reach out in love to those in the margins, those whom society would cast away. He was holy because he imitated God. I believe Lakan is holy for those same reasons. He is a child of God. He does what God requires of him. He is not afraid to touch what is dirty, to help the one who is afflicted, to reach out in love to his brother who lives in the margin and whom society would prefer not to see at all. Lakan is Christ to his brother.

We are called to do the same. There is nothing easy about this but it is what we are called to do. We are God's children. We are to reach out in love to those who are dirty, those whom society will not see, those who are afflicted, those who are other than we are. "Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us, and gave himself us for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (Ephesians 5:1-2) "Be Christ to one another." (Ephesians 4:32) Amen.