

I have said this to you before, but I am going to say it again: I think that preaching sometimes gets a bad rap. When someone is telling someone else what to do, they are often said to be *preaching*. Kids often say their parents *preach* to them, when they are verbally chastising them. It is not unusual in an argument for someone to say to the other, “Don’t *preach* to me!” Preaching is often perceived as speaking a bad word to the other, a word of bad news, a word that is meant to induce guilt or shame. Preaching is for some a long list of things that you are **supposed** to do, even though you probably don’t want to do them. Now as someone who *preaches* for a living, I am bothered by such an analysis of my task. As a good **Lutheran** preacher I understand preaching not as an experience in bad news. No, for us preaching is the proclamation of good news—the **good** news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It isn’t, first and foremost, a long list of things you are **supposed** to do.

Now once in a while, though, a Biblical reading comes along that lends itself to being preached as a long list of things we are to do. And today is one of those days. This isn’t my style, but the ethical advice from our second lesson from Ephesians is just too good not to list, not to make the source of my preaching. But I will do it as a good Lutheran would. I will place the admonitions from Ephesians in their context. The theological context is this, or shall I say, the good news is this: God has made us all one; Jews and Gentiles, insiders and outsiders, those who have been here for a while and those who are brand new are all one. It is God’s great gift to us, to the world. We don’t create this unity. We don’t manufacture it. It comes as sheer gift, the result of the gracious work of God in Jesus Christ. We are no longer strangers. We

are a part of one another. We are linked. In the cross of Christ the wall that divides has been torn down.

Now therefore, put away all falsehood, speaking the truth to one another. Marva Dawn, a Lutheran thinker, says, “We live in a culture of fabrications, fibs, fraudulence, and falsity . . . Advertisements use words such as stupendous and extraordinary to describe mere laundry soap.” And Dawn rightfully asks, “What detergent fits those verbalizations?”

We live in a world that offers all kinds of false promises. We keep the truth from one another, afraid that if the truth were known people wouldn’t welcome us into their lives. We protect our children from the realities of the real world. We live lies. We maintain family secrets. Some of us create, as Marva Dawn says, “deceptive personalities” to “camouflage character deficiencies.” We live in a culture of fabrications, fibs, fraudulence, and falsity.

But we who are one, we who are grounded in the remarkable grace of God that sets us free from our pasts, gives us status apart from we own or how we appear—we can put away all falsehood. We can speak truth to our neighbors. The truth will not harm us. Hiding from it will. Besides, we are “members of one another.” We are linked almost bodily. We are deeply connected. What is the point of hiding the truth then?

We are no longer strangers. The walls that divide us have been torn down. Now, therefore, “Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil.” There is no doubt but that anger has been given bad press in the culture and in the church. And I must admit that I have been one to contribute to that bad press, not so much by what I say but how I process anger in my own life. The author of Ephesians is making it clear that anger is not a

bad thing. Anger is neither bad nor good. It is simply how we feel sometimes. And at times it is quite appropriate. “Be angry, but do not let the sun go down on your anger.” Now some people interpret that line literally, and I think that is helpful. They won’t go to bed without making up to the one with whom they are angry. Whether or not we interpret this verse literally, what I hear from Paul or from one of his disciples is the call not to allow anger to take root. Rooted anger is anger that makes room for the devil, anger that makes room for the creation of lives and hearts that are ugly. Some of us are in our very being angry, and sometimes we don’t even know it. Something happened that make us angry, and we held on to the anger. It’s time to deal with it. The devil has had his day. We are one. The wall that separates us has been broken down. Why continue to live in anger that only serves to tear us all apart?

And why continue to live in a way that disregards the well-being of others? We are one. So “thieves must give up stealing.” Rather, “let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy.” The older I get the more I appreciate honest labor, the more I understand the importance of working hard. For some, work is thought to be a noose around our necks that we must put up with so that we can get money to get what we want in life. For me, that is a very shallow notion of what work is. Sure we have the tradition out of Genesis that sees hard work as part of the burden of life, but work is also great gift. It is a part how we contribute to the well being of the whole. One of the things that those of us who work with the poor need to comprehend is that certainly the poor need things and money, but they also need the ability to contribute. We do not assist the poor or our children (and this is

something I've got to learn) by not allowing them to contribute to the well-being of the community of which they are a part. Ephesians says that those who steal should work with their own hands so that they have something to share with the needy. We need not only to receive; we need to give. All of us have the need to contribute to the one body that we are a part of.

We are one. The wall that separates has been torn down. Now, therefore, "let no evil come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, so that your words may give grace to those who hear." That is such a beautiful notion: "your words may give grace to those who hear." Often our words can give anything but grace. Often they do not build up. They tear down. Often our words aren't an experience of the goodness of God. Some words have almost ruined people's lives. "Put away from you all bitterness