

CAN WE REALLY BE AT PEACE WITH ONE ANOTHER?

Devotional for September 30, 2018 based upon Mark 9: 50 and Ephesians 4: 31-32

We read about and feel the tone of American politics, the climate in our society, the acts of terrorism and violence all around the world, and the relational dynamics in so many marriages and families, and we wonder, How can we possibly do what Jesus said in our Gospel lesson for this morning? "Be at peace with one another."

The truth is, we human beings – on our own – are not able to be at peace with one another. Basic human selfishness, self-centeredness, and sin make that impossible. But I believe that the apostle Paul – in his letter to the Ephesians – tells us how God can make us able to do what humanly speaking – on our own – we would never be able to do. Be at peace with one other.

Paul writes, "Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you."

The world is full – our society is full – of people who are bitter and angry. Angry at the world because it has not given them enough. Angry at God because they do not feel He has treated them fairly. Angry at their spouses. Angry at their children. Angry at their neighbors. Angry at their job. Here Paul gives us a survival message that says, "If you want to make it, you simply cannot live like that anymore. It will eat you up." Then he gives us a way to get rid of our anger. To get rid of bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, and slander, there are three things we need to do. First, be kind to one another. Second, be tenderhearted. And third, forgive one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

First, BE KIND TO ONE ANOTHER. There are so many people who are just plain self-centered and rude. They are concerned only about themselves. They demonstrate no concern for anyone else. Paul wrote in his letter to his young friend Titus, "We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another." (3: 3) But then he says, "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to His mercy." (3:4-5) It is only because of God's kindness and mercy that we are saved. If God reacted to us the way that we react to one another, He would have given up on us a long time ago. But instead He reaches out to us with love and kindness.

Second, BE TENDERHEARTED TO ONE ANOTHER. The word "compassion" means to feel with. Being compassionate simply means that your feelings are important to me and they have become a part of my life so that I have come to share and understand how and what you feel and what is going on inside of you.

And then, third, FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER. I believe that Paul had a reason to put this one last, because I really do not think that we can forgive somebody until we have first done the other two. Until we have first learned to be kind to them, and until we have become tenderhearted and compassionate towards them and have come to understand what is going on inside of them. But if we have first learned the lessons of kindness and compassion, then forgiveness can follow.

So how about you? Have you experienced – have you received – the kindness of God? Have you received His kindness so that then you can go out and share that kindness with other people?

Have you experienced – really experienced - how compassionate and tenderhearted God is towards you? He understands you. He knows and cares about what you think and how you feel. He knows all your worries, concerns, disappointments, and joys. Having experienced His tenderhearted compassion, are you tenderhearted and compassionate towards others?

Have you received and experienced the forgiveness of God? He wants to – and He can – forgive you all your sins. If you have received and experienced His forgiveness, are you now able to forgive others?

It is if – and only if – we have experienced His kindness, tasted His compassion, and received His forgiveness, that we are then able to really be at peace with one another.

Pastor Dennis D. Nelson