

Devotionals: FaithWalk

Date: July 4-5, 2009

Text: Exodus 20:16; Ephesians 4:25-32

**Theme: Taking Root: The Gospel Rules
...Speaking Truth**

Welcome We've all heard the quip "sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me" and may have even said it at some point in our lives. What comes to your mind when you hear that saying? On some basic level it seems reasonable that words can't hurt us but we've all been the recipient of words that have stung. It's at those times that we may not necessarily believe that words don't hurt, especially if those words come from someone who is close to us or someone we admire.

In this week's text the apostle Paul teaches us that living our lives in the truth of Jesus creates the solid foundation on which a healthy community resides.

Prayer... Lord God, we have a deep desire to mend the hurts that lie on our hearts and renew relationships that were damaged because of those hurts but sometimes find it very difficult to want a reconciliation. We ask for your help and guidance to see us through those things that can be most difficult and give us the courage to take a step toward unity. Amen.

Equip **Read Exodus 20:16.** You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. The original intent behind this commandment was to protect the integrity of judging people in ancient Israel. Trials in ancient Israel were public events that took place at the city gate where the entire community could gather to witness the proceedings. In order to gain a conviction of the person charged with a crime, the testimony of two or three witnesses was required. This protected all members of the community from being falsely accused and convicted since telling lies in court would have been done in front of one's friends and neighbors.

- *How would someone giving false witness hurt a community?*
- *How does speaking truth bring unity?*
- *Can speaking truth bring disunity? If so, how can that be resolved?*

Over time the meaning of this commandment expanded beyond the ancient courts to include lying of any kind. There are numerous passages from Proverbs, Hosea, and Leviticus that warn of how lies hurt not only an individual but a community as well. In fact, when you look at the number of references to lying in the Old Testament it becomes apparent that the importance of speaking truth was as vital in ancient times as it is today. Find a passage in Proverbs that speaks about lying.

- *How does the passage apply to your life? Can it be applied to unity? If so, how?*

Read Ephesians 4:25-32. Just prior to this text, Paul is reminding the Ephesians to live a life that aligns with what they've come to

know through Jesus and that they should make every effort to keep unity within their community. Paul doesn't leave it at just making a suggestion but goes on to point out things that will tear them apart. Things like lying to or about each other, stealing from each other, and even being angry with others has the potential to divide a community. In each of those examples a trust between people is broken creating a chasm that can be very difficult to overcome.

- *Are there people in your life you don't trust?*
- *How do you treat them?*
- *Were you able to trust again? If so, what did it take to trust again?*

Paul also knew that by focusing on the things that would tear the Ephesians apart he could come across as just chastising them without giving any solutions. In order to take full advantage of the opportunity to teach Jesus' truth, Paul gives hope and encouragement to the Ephesians by reminding them of the ways they can attain unity. He reminds them that they should move away from personal attacks, letting go of anger and spite and instead find ways to build each other up so that they may grow. Paul knew this could be very difficult but knew that as the Ephesians started to remember Jesus' truth of compassion, kindness, and forgiveness they would start to move together.

- *Why is unity such an important thing to Paul?*
- *How important is it for us today?*
- *To what length will you go to maintain unity in a group?*

Send Unity is defined as the state or quality of being one or being in accord. We can think of it simply as harmony. Paul's letter to the Ephesians stressed the importance of unity among them because he knew it would bring strength to their community which would allow them to live out the truth that Jesus taught. He knew that there would always be differences and that people would hurt each other, but what Paul was worried about with the Ephesians was that they would get so focused on their differences or hurts that they would lose sight of the things that bound them together.

We can take Paul's concern for the Ephesians and see that he would have the same concern for us. The foundation of a community is the individual relationships that are forged. If those relationships are based on truth, the strength of the community will be aligned with Jesus' teachings of love, respect, and compassion which create a deep desire to work through the things that hurt and divide us. This focus on unity brings health to the community which brings life to the individuals and allows the community to focus outside of itself in order to be part of God's kingdom by reaching out to those in need with compassion and love.

Prayer... Heavenly Father, we are grateful for the patience and love you show us as we work through the hurts that we've inflicted on each other. We desire to deepen our relationships with you and each other in order to strengthen the unity we have through you. Help us to create communities that are focused on being active parts in your kingdom here on earth. Amen.