

NO LONGER STRANGERS: Making Peace

Ephesians 4:25 - 5:2

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WATCH/LISTEN: www.fbcjc.org/sermon/no-longer-strangers-making-peace/

I.

Do you ever need a pep talk? Maybe you stand in front of the mirror in the morning and recite Stuart Smalley's daily affirmation that you are good enough, you are smart enough, and, doggone it, people like you. Or maybe you channel your inner Jessica, the adorable curly-blonde-haired 4-year-old who went viral several years ago for her affirmation song and dance in her bathroom mirror. The video, viewed over 23 million times, features Jessica declaring with positivity all the things she likes in her life, like her family, her presents, her hair, and sharks. While not intended for an audience of millions, her energetic self-talk has inspired others to be grateful and positive.

Some children have intentionally sought to share kindness and positivity with the world, such as the West Side Union Grade School elementary students in Healdsburg, California. During the pandemic, two art teachers at the school spoke with their young students about how they could stay positive throughout the pandemic and during the spread of local wildfires in the area. As a result of those conversations, Peptoc was born. Peptoc is a hotline anyone can call to hear kind words and advice from elementary school students. The name came from a 6-year-old student who misspelled pep talk. Since launching in 2022, they've received over 17 million calls, including a couple from me.

The students' unscripted motivational words were collected and recorded by the students for the free hotline. Whatever your worry, they've got a solution.

"Go get your wallet and spend it on ice cream and shoes."

"Be grateful for yourself."

"You aren't the only one who sighs loudly."

"If you're frustrated, you can always go to your bedroom, punch a pillow or cry on it, and just go scream outside."

"If you're feeling up high and unbalanced, think of groundhogs."

"You are loved."

Peptoc has an Instagram account and released its first book on August 6 titled, "You are amazing like a rocket!" If you need a word of encouragement and positivity from a kindergarten, call 707-8PEPTOC (Make your call after the service, of course.) These kids and their teachers are making the world better, one phone call at a time.

We learn a lot from children. Children remind us of important things we knew when we were younger that we tend to forget as we get older. In the gospels of Matthew and Mark, we read the words of Jesus, reminding us that being like a little child is how we enter the kingdom of God.

II.

American author and minister Robert Fulghum is well-known for his book *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*.ⁱ This is what he wrote:

All I really need to know about how to live and what to do and how to be I learned in kindergarten. Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate school mountain, but there in the sand pile at school.

These are the things I learned:

- *Share everything.*
- *Play fair.*
- *Do1n't hit people.*
- *Put things back where you found them.*
- *Clean up your own mess.*
- *Don't take things that aren't yours.*
- *Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.*
- *Wash your hands before you eat.*
- *Flush.*
- *Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.*
- *Live a balanced life – learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some.*
- *Take a nap every afternoon.*
- *When you go out in the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands and stick together.*
- *Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the Styrofoam cup: the roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that.*
- *Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the Styrofoam cup – they all die. So do we.*
- *And then remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word you learned – the biggest word of all – LOOK.*

Everything you need to know is in there somewhere. The Golden Rule and love and basic sanitation. Ecology and politics and equality and sane living.

Take any one of those items and extrapolate it into sophisticated adult terms and apply it to your family life or your work or government or your world and it holds true and clear and firm. Think what a better world it would be if we all – the whole world – had cookies and milk at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon and then lay down with our blankies for a nap. Or if all governments had as a basic policy to always put things back where they found them and to clean up their own mess.

And it is still true, no matter how old you are, when you go out in the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together.

III.

Sometimes, we complicate inherently simple things in our pursuit of spiritual maturity. We get lost in the complexities of theology, doctrines, and the details of our daily lives, forgetting the foundational truths that should guide us.

For three long, complicated chapters, the letter to the Ephesians has been explaining God's plan of salvation in breathtaking terms: "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ." (1:10) That plan begins with God saving individuals "by grace... through faith."

(2:8) But God was not content with uniting individual people to himself. God also intends to unite Jew and Gentile in Christ, to “create in himself one new humanity out of the two....” (2:15, 16). All that uniting is ultimately designed to make it “so that through the church, the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (3:10,11) In these first three chapters, we’ve soared into outer space as we’re given the most complete, over-arching account of what God is up to in Jesus Christ.

Now, for the last three chapters, it’s time to come down to earth and tell us precisely what God’s cosmic plan means for us as we walk the streets of our cities and towns.

In his famous essay, Fulghum reminds us that the lessons we learn as children—like sharing, being kind, and cleaning up after ourselves—are profound truths that shape who we are and how we best live in community with one another. These lessons align beautifully with the teachings in Ephesians 4:25-5:2 where we find a summary of practical ways to keep the peace.

“What this adds up to, then, is this: no more lies, no more pretense. Tell your neighbor the truth. In Christ’s body we’re all connected to each other, after all. When you lie to others, you end up lying to yourself.

Go ahead and be angry. You do well to be angry—but don’t use your anger as fuel for revenge. And don’t stay angry. Don’t go to bed angry. Don’t give the Devil that kind of foothold in your life.

No more stealing. Get an honest job so that you can help others who can’t work. Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift. Don’t grieve God. Don’t break God’s heart. God’s Holy Spirit, moving and breathing in you, is the most intimate part of your life, making you fit for himself. Don’t take such a gift for granted.

Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you. Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn’t love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.”ⁱⁱ

I don’t know about you, but it sounds to me that long before Robert Fulghum’s essay about lessons from kindergarten, we had the lessons of Jesus to shape who we are and how we best live in community with one another. All the lessons from our text today concern how to best live in relationship with one another. This is how you become the community that God will use to reveal God’s kingdom in the here and now.

IV.

This advice seems so simple and straightforward. But I suspect we all find them challenging to follow. Confession time: how many of you have avoided speaking the truth, not to deceive, necessarily, but perhaps because the truth was hard to hear? How many of you have found yourself

holding on to anger over a situation for a very long time? How many have let words exit our mouths or our fingertips on social media that caused hurt, and not grace, to the ones who hear us?

None of this is easy. But it is necessary, as Chapter 5 tells us, for this is what our words and actions will be like if we are imitators of God as God's beloved children. In his sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." We are called children of God when we make peace, walk in love just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, and live out the profound truth of "All I Really Need to Know I Learned from Jesus."

Working for peace is not optional, and it is not conditional, either. Nowhere does Jesus teach us to be kind and tenderhearted only to those who are like us or not to let any evil words come out of our mouths or fingers except when we are at war with political enemies or ideologies. It is perhaps understandable that debates over moral and ethical issues raise the stakes and stir the passions of faithful people. There is such a thing as righteous anger, but as Ephesians 4:26 makes clear, it's not the anger itself that is the problem. It's what we do with it, and this Ephesian passage tells us what to do with it.

In its life lessons for those who lived in community in the early church, this passage from the letter to the people of Ephesus speaks good sense to us all: Tell the truth. Work it out if you're angry with your neighbor; don't let anger divide you. Don't steal. Work honestly and share with those in need. Be honest, but be positive. Be gracious. Forgive one another. And at the end of the day, love each other as Jesus loves us, and try to live as Jesus would have us live.

And maybe it is still true, like Fulghum wrote, that no matter how old you are, when you go out in the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together for the glory of God and the good of the world.

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All scripture quoted is from the NRSVUE unless otherwise noted.

ⁱ <https://www.comfortspringstation.com/2018/12/28/all-i-need-to-know/>

ⁱⁱ Ephesians 4:24-5:2 from the Message