

“Being responsible for what we say and do”

Building up one another in love

March 9, 2008

Text: Deuteronomy 11:18-21, Ephesians 4:25-5:2

I.

Well, it’s Girl Scout Sunday today at our church. This is the first time we’ve celebrated Girl Scout Sunday in my almost-eight years here.

We’re honored to have a number of Girl Scouts here today from other troops, as well as from our own TROOP 510.

My sermon this morning is right from the Girl Scout Law, which was read to us earlier ... focusing on ***Being responsible for what we say and do.***

When we open up this theme of *responsibility*—*responsibility for what we say and do*—there’s lots to unpack, particularly for our too-often **short-term**-focused, **immediate gratification** culture.

When we talk about being responsible for our words and our actions, immediately we’re reminded that there are consequences in this life—consequences, everyday—to what we say ... and what we do.

Which is to say that our words matter; our actions and our deeds matter. We see this everyday in our family life and church life ... where we learn through the years that things we do and say can hurt people.

Easily, feelings get hurt ... which is why it’s so important to weigh the consequences of what we do and say. I can tell you from years of experience in the church that it’s amazing what people can get upset over. With the music ... or the language in the liturgy, the order of the service ... to say nothing of stuff happening in the kitchen.

And so we need to be careful and take measure before we say something or do something.

II.

The Bible, of course, knows this ... as we see, straight away this morning, from our reading I just shared from **Ephesians**.

Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up. And going on, **Ephesians** says:

- *put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with malice ...*
- *and be kind to one another and tender-hearted ...*

The essential message of the Bible for all social-interaction is to *do what builds up ... do what makes things better*. Interestingly enough, another affirmation in the **Girl Scout Law** is that very thing: *I will do my best to make the world a better place*.

We talk about this all the time in our church ... about keeping the BIG PICTURE in mind ... in everything—in all that we say and do.

In other words, everyday, every moment, in whatever we say and do: *make things better*. Do and say what is going to *build up* the family, or the church, or the team, or whatever it is. Friends, life is too short to spend it being negative ... and pessimistic ... and always looking at the glass half empty.

III.

Our words matter. They matter because when used carelessly—without the BIG PICTURE in mind, they hurt. They bring deep pain to real human persons.

There are countless thousands in our culture who struggle—on some level—everyday over matters of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. For our young people—youth and children—trying to figure out who they are, sometimes these struggles can be excruciatingly painful.

The truth of our lives is that we're all born into some race or ethnic group; that's who we are (and that ought to be a good thing). And we all come into this world with a particular gender and sexual orientation (again, that ought to be a good thing). That's the way God make us; that's who we are.

And for some of our cultural icons in the world of sports and talk radio to make careless, insensitive comments—as happens now and then—there are consequences.

A few years back, Miami Heat star Tim Hardaway was banned from the NBA All Star game and his reputation was seriously damaged by a careless comment he made on talk radio when, without thinking it through, he said he *hated gays*. And more recently, noted radio talk show host, Don Imus, was fired after a no-less insensitive comment he made about the women's basketball team at Rutgers University.

In fairness to Hardaway, who seems to be a good guy, he has since made outstanding positive strides in redeeming himself in what appears to be a sincere and genuine way. Some time after his hurtful comments, he said: *I had no idea how much I hurt people*.

Our words matter.

IV.

And of course our actions matter, too. And it's not always easy to stay on track. We all know, there are times we feel like saying things or doing things ... things that if we could calculate it out, we know we will later regret.

Ephesians challenges us at this point to do the *right* thing.

*Put away from you all **bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander,** together with all **malice ...and be KIND to one another ... tender-hearted ... forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.***

Now, you may not feel like it. You may not feel like turning the other cheek ... or letting something go (just *let it go*). You may be so upset, so annoyed, angry, hurt—whatever it is—that you can't keep yourself from responding and, truth be told, making everything worse.

GET THIS: ***don't do it!*** Do the *right* thing.

One of the most important lessons to learn in life is to be able to **separate our feelings from our actions**. It's okay to feel *whatever we feel*. Hey, we're human; we're going to have feelings on everything. Our feelings are what they are.

But that doesn't mean we have to act on them. Our actions, our behaviors, are things we have control over. We can choose to DO or *not* do them.

Remember: it's important in our lives—as much as is possible—to aim for the spiritual high ground. The *high ground* is where God's grace and forgiveness and mercy rule the day. That's where LOVE is in its most exalted form ... on the *high ground*.

V.

Friends, our lives are complicated. Our relationships, at times, are complicated. We're all unique, with our own unique story that sometimes we ourselves don't even understand.

And here we are—trying to get along, trying to make our marriages work ... trying to be good parents and good children to our parents ... trying to be good citizens and good Christians.

It's a load. We have lots on our plates. And along the way, all kinds of feelings are evoked ... about whatever.

On the one hand, that's okay ... because we're all human and we have all kinds of feelings about all kinds of things. But on the other hand, *so what?* We're to do the *right* thing in spite of our feelings.

Aim for the *high ground*. The important thing is not what we feel but what we do and say. Our behaviors. That's what's important.

Doing the *right* thing is the way we take responsibility for what we do and say.

VI.

And so, as parents and grandparents, what do we do? We know the teachings of the Bible—the teachings of God—are *right* and *good*. And they're reflected beautifully in much of the Girl Scout Law which has been shared with us this morning.

Friends, we have to pass these teachings—these *guidelines for living* from God—onto our families, beginning with ourselves.

The first step is to prioritize our lives in such a way that God is number one. And the way we make God number one is by *practicing the presence of God* every day.

What would God want me to do in any particular situation? What would reflect God's will? To catch a glimpse God's will, we're invited to look at the life of Jesus ... and to remember that God claims Jesus' life as God's very own life.

All the time, Jesus was kind and forgiving, loving and compassionate—again and again embodying a gospel of sacrificial love.

That's heavy stuff. And that's how we *practice the presence of God* everyday in our lives. By seeking to emulate the life of Jesus.

Deuteronomy has a plan; and the plans says, ***Make it personal!***

Put these words of mine in your heart and soul ... Deuteronomy is talking here about the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai. But we can substitute in Jesus' teaching here as well.

- *bind them on your hand, says Deuteronomy.*
- *fix them as an emblem on your forehead.*
- *Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away ... when you lie down and when you rise.*
- *Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates ...*
- *so that your days may be multiplied in the land ... as long as the heavens are above the earth.*

Again, friends, we take responsibility for our lives ... we build up one another in love ... by *practicing the presence of God*; and by aiming for the *high ground* ...where grace and forgiveness and compassion fill the air.

And where love is everywhere; and where we seek, day after day—moment after moment—to *do the right thing*.

All praise be unto God! Amen!

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