

Year B

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

One day a woman in a brand new Volvo had been driving around a crowded car park. She finally found a spot and was just about to reverse into it when a young driver in a sporty BMW whizzed into the spot before her. As the BMW driver got out of his car and was walking away the lady in the Volvo called out “I found that place first. What gives you the right to push in and take it?” The young man laughed and said “Because I’m young and quick” and kept on walking. All of sudden he

heard the hideous sound of a car being heartily smashed. He turned around to see the lady in the Volvo repeatedly ramming her car into his. She caught his eye and said “That’s because I’m old and rich!”

There was a little boy with a bad temper. His father gave him a bag of nails and told him that every time he lost his temper, to hammer a nail in the back fence. The first day the boy had driven 37 nails into the fence. Then it gradually dwindled down. He discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the fence. Finally the day came when the boy didn’t

lose his temper at all. He told his father about it and the father suggested that the boy now pull out one nail for each day that he was able to hold his temper.

The days passed and the young boy was finally able to tell his father that all the nails were gone. The father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence. He said, "You have done well, my son, but look at the holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same. When you say things in anger, they leave a scar just like this one. You can put a knife in a man and draw it out. It won't

matter how many times you say 'I'm sorry', the wound is still there.”

Anger is a massive problem in society. It manifests itself in so many different ways. It's not as simple to identify as the person who goes red in the face, with steam coming out of their ears! In fact, anger is much more likely to reveal itself subtly, by manipulation; a so-called passive anger which eats away at relationships until only bitterness is left. Paul wrote in verse 26; “Be angry but do not sin”. I think his tongue was firmly planted in his cheek at that point. It is possible to display a very particular

righteous anger but I would suggest to you that it is not easy to stay within those very particular parameters. Anger is to be avoided. It eats away at good relationships and ends up destroying the person who cannot deal with it.

By all means speak the truth, Paul counselled, but the truth alone is not a sufficient warrant for speech. This is, for me, a very significant teaching for our age. Social media has many good things going for it but with the good comes the dangerous. Some people build up significant followings on their blogs or their twitter feeds and the

temptation is to quickly get the comment out and to await the cheers from the followers. That's the way, for example, that Donald Trump appears to run his government! But we find it also in the religious community as well. Some take glory in speaking the truth. They claim that they are not called to be 'nice' but instead to speak the truth. Many unkind thoughts are expressed and the cheering followers may leave a poor soul crushed. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit," Paul wrote. "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted."

Mamie Adams always went to a branch post office in her town because the postal employees there were friendly. She went there to buy stamps just before Christmas one year and the queues were particularly long. Someone pointed out that there was no need to wait in a queue because there was a stamp machine at the door. "I know," said Mamie, 'but the machine won't ask me about my arthritis."¹

We must not neglect good deeds of kindness. In fact that's the answer for an angry person. How do you deal with your temper? Be kind

¹ Bits and Pieces, December, 1989, p. 2.

to someone. Make that a habit and the steady but life changing effect of God's Spirit transforms the angry heart. What do you do if you've short-changed someone? Work honestly and give away the fruit of your labour and the steady life changing effect of God's Spirit transforms the deceptive heart. You are members of one another, sealed by the Holy Spirit of God and so how you behave towards one another matters greatly to God. It affects God. If we are not mindful of matters of our temper and of our generosity then our offering will not be fragrant like that of Christ - and that

matters. It's too easy to say, 'well, Christ has done it for us', and walk away. We are bound forever to the one whose words gave grace to those who heard and who gave freely to the needy at every turn. We must never be talking and walking contradictions.

We're accustomed to thinking of strength as opposite to gentleness, softness and tenderness. Yet this is not always true. We are commemorating the centenary of the founding of the RAF this year. The RAF emerged from the Royal Flying Corps and the incredible acts of bravery displayed during the early years of the First World War.

During the early air battles the British fighter pilots made an amazing discovery. They discovered that thick layers of silk stopped low velocity shrapnel better than steel. So they wound the silk around their heads and then wore leather horse riding helmets on top of the silk.

Scientists still aren't sure just what it is that gives silk its strength, but it's true, that in certain situations soft, gentle, tender silk can prove far stronger than cold, hard steel.²

Jesus showed us the same holds true for human character and Paul was convinced

² Scientific information from Dr Karl Kruszelnicki's New Moments in Science

that the principals that Jesus lived by should hold true for his followers also. Some people try to make themselves impenetrable to the people around them - displays of passive anger abound. Jesus showed us that gentleness; a heart that's soft toward others - and tenderness are in fact qualities of great strength. We must determine to live by them. Amen.