

Pastor Keith E. Wiens

August 9, 2009

Text: Ephesians 4:25-5:2

Pentecost 10

### MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD

What would it be like if you could trust everyone because everyone always spoke the truth? Wouldn't that be something? What would it be like if you never had to lock your doors because no one would ever steal from anyone? Would you like to live in such a place? What would it be like if you never heard any foul language, never heard any gossip, never heard any complaining, never heard any put-downs? Would that be good? What would it be like if everyone was always kind, always tenderhearted, always ready to forgive? Could you handle that?

Well, God dreams of a church filled with people who dare to live that way. God dreams of a church filled with people who are bold enough to live in a radically different way from the way the world around them lives. God dreams of a church filled with people who show the world that there really is a better option.

The last few weeks we have been talking about the dreams God has for the church. The New Testament book of Ephesians has been our guide. This brief letter, written by the Apostle Paul to Christians living in the city of Ephesus, lays out God's vision for the church. The reading for today is about people - and that's what the church is, the church is people, people who trust God because of Jesus - the reading for today is about people who live in a different way.

And why? Because this world needs a better option. There is far too much lying and stealing and evil talk. There is far too much bitterness and wrath and slander and malice. There are far too many times of people hurting one another and causing pain and grief. The world's a mess. It really is! I don't need to elaborate on it. Just read the newspaper or turn on the TV or check out the headlines on Yahoo. We really need a better option.

And God envisions that the church leads the way! God envisions that people of the church be a light that shines brightly in the darkness of this world. God envisions that people of the church be salt in a tasteless world. God envisions that people of the church be people who truly love one another. God envisions that the people of the church be a sign of God's presence in the world.

So you see, how you live is important. What you say, what you do, how you treat others - at home, at work, in school, at the ball park, when shopping, while driving - it is vitally important.

Let's be clear, though. How you live doesn't affect how much God loves you. You know, it is easy for us to think that our relationship with God depends on how we live. We think that if we do good and follow the commandments, God will like us, and if we don't do good and don't follow the commandments, God will not like us. It is easy to think that our salvation depends on being good. We think that if we are good, we will go to heaven, and if we are not good, we won't go to heaven. But that's not true.

God's love for you is sure and certain. Your relationship with God depends on Jesus, not on how you live. Because Jesus did what is good and right, God has chosen to love you. Because Jesus suffered and died on the cross, God has chosen to save you. Your relationship with God doesn't depend on how you live.

That doesn't mean that how you live doesn't matter. It does. It matters to the world. It matters to the people around you. It matters to your family. It matters to your neighbors. It matters to the people you work with. How you live can make all the difference in the world!

It was in July when Kelley and Kendra moved into a new neighborhood and met Maddie who lived next door. As summer turned into fall and school started, the girls spent more and more time together. Kelley and Kendra's parents were impressed with Maddie. She always told the truth. She never said anything mean about other people. She was kind and caring. And she readily forgave when Kelley or Kendra would say or do something that would hurt her.

The friendship of the girls led to the two families enjoying backyard cookouts. Early in October, at one of their evening cookouts, the two fathers talked about baseball and the upcoming World Series and lawn care and work. Kelley and Kendra's father, Stan, punctuated their conversation with questions about the purpose of life, human misery, and God. You see, Stan had never gone to church and didn't believe in God. But the way Maddie conducted herself made such an impression on him that he wanted to find out more about this family and what they believed. In time, Stan and his family began to worship with Maddie and her family, got involved in some Bible study groups, and the following Easter the whole family was baptized.

How you live really does matter. God can use your words and your actions to make a huge difference in the lives of others!

God has an incredible dream for you and your life. So put away the old life. Live a new life. Imitate God. Be like Christ who loved you and gave himself up for you, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Yes, God is dreaming about you and the really neat things that will happen when you let your light shine.