

May I speak in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I want to say a few words about that epistle reading that we just heard from the book of Ephesians. It seems to me to be an excellent reading for an occasion such as this, of a baptism service, as we'll soon be baptizing Emmet. I realize it can sound in this passage as if Paul is simply moralizing. As if he's just telling people how to behave. There's much in this passage that can be found elsewhere in the ancient world. It's not as if Paul here is being startlingly original.

What's different about what he says is the motivation for this moral teaching which he presents. The framework for the ethical instruction he offers here is baptism. In the verse before, where our reading begins, we read this, "Put away your former way of life, your old self, to be renewed, being clothed with the new self." Just notice that those verbs are in the passive. Be renewed. Be clothed. We don't renew ourselves, we don't clothe ourselves. It is God's work by the Spirit who brings that new life. And Paul constantly draws attention in his writings between the old life, and the new life that begins in Christ Jesus, and baptism is a sign of the beginning of that new life, that new way of being in the Spirit.

And Emmet's parents and godparents will soon be promising to renounce various things, to turn. The baptism service uses the language of turning, of repenting. Turning from this way of going, the old way. Turning towards a new way of living in the power of the Spirit. Turning from the way of the flesh, to the life of the Spirit. Baptism is about turning towards Jesus Christ. Seeking to walk His ways. And that's the context, the background to what Paul is writing in the epistle that we heard read. It's because of this new life, he's spelling out what that new life looks like, what the new life in Christ is to be.

So, we're not to understand this passage simply as how to be nice to each other. It's about how we live the new life that Christ has won for us. This is what the new life looks like. Through baptism, we're grafted into the body of Christ. We become God's redeemed people. And as Paul says in this passage, we've been marked in baptism with the seal of God's Holy Spirit. We're now to live a life rooted in love. "We live in love," Paul says. "Rooted and grounded in the love of Christ Jesus." We live in love as we're imitating the One who loves us and spared

nothing in giving up His life for us to show the extent, the depth, the fullness of the love which He has for each of His people.

So, let me pick out three characteristics of this new life that we have in Christ Jesus. The first just makes us realize that this is not a life in which there are no cross words. It's not another worldly, hopelessly idealistic kind of life. "Be angry," Paul says. "But do not sin." He knows we can all get angry, and anger can lead us to do foolish things.

I'm not sure if this story is true, it may be apocryphal, but I heard this week about a woman who was trying to park in La Jolla Shores. I don't know if you've tried there in the last few weeks; it's a nightmare. This woman, she'd driven around, she'd only driven around for half an hour, but she did find somewhere. So it just took her a moment to get the car into reverse, and in that moment, some young turk just snuck in. Took her place. So she wound the window down, let down the window, and said, "I was here first. This was my parking space. What are you doing?" And the bloke very dismissively looks at her and said, "Well, that's because I'm young and quick." And off he went, rather haughtily. After a few moments, he heard a terrible crashing sound. He saw the woman driving her car into his car. He said, "What's that about?" She said, with a smile on her face, "That's because I'm old and rich." "Be angry," Saint Paul says, "But do not sin."

Then he gives a fantastic piece of advice, and how much better our lives would be with our families, with those we live, with our church, if we followed this bit of advice. "Do not let the sun go down on your anger." Simple, but what a difference that would make if we followed it. There's a national park ranger in British Columbia who has on his wall not just one huge set of antlers, but two, because they're bound together. So, obviously, what had happened is that two large moose got into an argument. Their antlers got locked together, and their anger literally killed them. We're not to hold on to anger. Don't let the sun go down on your anger. Or as I once heard a Pentecostal preacher said, "Don't nurse it, don't curse it, don't rehearse it. But disperse it, and God will reverse it."

The second characteristic of this new life, forgiveness. Forgiveness is an unnatural act. It always goes against the grain. It always smacks of somebody getting away

with it, and we don't like that. The natural thing to do is not to forgive.

I know this an extreme example, but I did read in the British papers of two sisters who lived together for decades. Then they had a falling out. And they just couldn't make up. So, one of them took a piece of chalk and drew a line down the middle of the house, and until the day they died, they never crossed the line. They never spoke to each other. The lack of forgiveness can do terrible things.

But that's the way of the world. As W. H. Auden said, "I and the public know what all schoolchildren learn, that to whom evil is done, do evil in return." The law of nature admits no forgiveness. Do squirrels forgive cats for chasing them up trees? Do dolphins forgive sharks for eating their playmates? No. It's a dog-eat-dog world, not a dog-forgive-dog world.

But Saint Paul says, "Our new life in the Spirit is different." Part of putting off the old ways is learning to forgive. And why do we forgive? Well, there are several good reasons which I might get to in another sermon, but there's one very good reason embedded in this passage. Why do we forgive? Saint Paul says, "Forgive one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you." We are a forgiven people. And therefore, we're to live as forgiving people. Those of us who know God's forgiveness should extend forgiveness to others. The new life we're called to live isn't about being nice to one another. It's not about doing the right thing to earn God's favor. It is about responding to the love of God in Christ Jesus. He loved us before we could do anything to merit that love and affection. "He died for us," Paul says, "Whilst we were yet sinners."

And the baptism of a child is a fantastic example of that. An example of God's offer of new life, of forgiveness, of redemption. All there before Baby Emmet has done anything to merit that prize. God's love to us comes to us before we do anything to deserve it. That's what grace is, and we are a people of grace. The new life we live in the power of the Spirit is our response to God who has done so much for us in Christ Jesus.

So, the final characteristic is kindness. "We're called," Paul says, "to be kind to one another. Be kind and tenderhearted to one another." You'll know who Jeff Bezos is, the CEO of Amazon. He had dinner with the President last night. When he was 10 years old, he saw

an advertisement with one of those anti-smoking ads on telly that said that you reduce your life by two minutes for every cigarette you smoke. And he was staying with his grandparents at the time, and he was a math whiz, as you might expect. So, he worked out, he did a sum, and he worked out how long his grandmother had lost to smoking. So, he went to his grandmother and said, "Grandma, I've done the maths. Because of all the cigarettes you've smoked, you're going to lose 16 years of your life." Well, you can imagine the grandmother was a bit upset. She started to cry, went off crying, and the grandfather came over and took young Bezos off to one side, and he thought he was going to get really told off for upsetting his grandma. But he didn't. His grandfather said something which stuck with him forever, and it was this. He said, "You'll learn one day that it is much harder to be kind than to be clever."

We're to be kind and tenderhearted. We're to be kind to one another. And as Emmet grows up, there will no doubt be lots of concern and discussion about what school he goes to, how he does in his exams, what job he does. Let's not forget to pray and work to ensure that he grows up to be a kind man.

So, three characteristics of the new life we have in Christ. Three characteristics that are to be practiced in our homes and in our church. Being angry, but not sinning, being forgiving, and being kind. May God by his Spirit enable us to act according to His will.

Amen.