**Text**: **John 6:35, 41-51. Ephesians 4:25-5:2**

 **The Bethel Pulpit**

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

So how are you doing with your bed-time reading? Have you finished Ephesians yet? How about that 6th chapter of John?

Ephesians and John 6: these texts continue to shape our worship through the week-ends in August and those texts continue to be my recommends for your devotional reading. What do you know for sure about God? How does your life behavior reflect that belief? Speak the truth in love…what else have you gleaned from your reading of the Ephesians’ text?

As I read, again and again, this Ephesians’ text, I get a bit worried: worried that we will read the text as a works’ righteousness text: do this, do that, be sure you DON’t do this or that…

* Don’t go to bed angry
* Put away all falsehood…let no evil talk come out of your mouth
* No more stealing…work hard so you have something to give to those who can’t work
* Get rid of your bitter attitudes

Good rules for living, for sure! But we need to go deeper and ask WHY does such behavior matter…why does it matter to God?

Does God LOVE US MORE if/when we control our anger and our tongues, if/when we are kind and tenderhearted and forgiving to one another? If that were true, THAT would be a good reason to live that way…but you and I, grace-oriented disciples of Jesus, understand and live by v. 8 of chapter 2:

By grace we have been saved and this is not our own doing… so if and when we are kind and forgiving, we can’t go around bragging about it…

God’s love for us NEVER falters or changes…God’s love for us does NOT go up or down…God loves us ALWAYS deeper and more truly that any human love we can ever experience.

**So, then, the question remains: WHY does our good behavior matter?**

**So that Christ’s body…here on earth…you and me, working together…so that the body of**

**Christ will be made stronger and healthier and more truly witnessing to God’s love and grace.**

That’s what Ephesians is all about: you and me…building blocks in building God’s kingdom.

If that’s all you take away from these weeks of words from Ephesians, that’s totally sufficient. By my kindness, by the guarding of my tongue, by my willingness to ask for and offer forgiveness, God is at work building God’s kingdom here on earth.

Did you look at the cover of the bulletin? How many hair-do’s…or bald heads…do you recognize? Did you find yourself? The words are true: We don’t GO to church…we ARE Church. In the very, very ordinary ways of respect and courtesy and charity, we ARE Christ’s body…simple smiles, hugs, caring words…that’s how Christ’s Church is built, one person, one gesture at a time.

The prayer shawls that are on our railings and pews today are examples of those simple gestures that, one by one, build up the body of Christ. Do you know someone who would be comforted by having a prayer shawl from Bethel to hold and to touch? Take a shawl from worship today…along with a prayer card…God is in you and you and you…blessing all who created the shawls, you who bring one to a person separated from us, blessing that person…God, in and through us, is building the Body of Christ.

The promise in this text is sure: God, in Christ, is the power at work within US…and God will accomplish far more through us than we can EVER imagine. Our hymn says it all:

Take my life…Oh God, take my hands, take my feet,

take my lips, my intellect, take my voice, and most of all:

take my heart, it is thine own…make it be YOUR royal throne, O God of Love.

So now, are we almost totally DONE with the book of Ephesians ? Truly, I hope that we are NEVER done with Ephesians, but rather, I trust that we carry these words of promise of God’s presence with us always.

Oh, and one more thing !

**Be ready to be surprised at what God will do with who**

**you are and what you do with your very, very ordinary life !**