

## THE MESSAGE for Feb 20, 2011

**Ephesians 4:25-34**

*Encouraging*

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Oh the joys and the challenges of parenthood. Nothing prepares a person for parenthood. They really don't teach you to be a parent. You learn as you go, right? It's definitely on-the-job- training.

At the same time no one has more influence on a child's development than his or her parents. The number one job of parenthood is to help our children grow up and become adults to encourage them with certain values and principles. In our house we teach those values and principles every chance we get.

For example, on the days when I send our seven-year-old son out the door to catch the school bus in the morning, I say to him "Have fun! Learn a lot! Be nice to others!" That captures our family values and principles in a nut shell. "Have fun! Learn a lot! Be nice to others!"

I started saying that because he was bullied at the beginning of the school year. Amber and I talked with him about being bullied. We want him to respond in appropriate ways. And we don't want him to bully others. Bullying is a big problem in our schools. So I remind him, "Have fun! Learn a lot! Be nice to others!"

Imagine if someone said that to you as you headed out the door on your way to school or to work or to play or wherever you were going that day. "Have fun! Learn a lot! Be nice to others." Just think how our world would be different if we encouraged one another to live by those values and principles.

Unfortunately not everyone does. The goal of a bully is to destroy life not encourage it. Adam and Eve's son, Cain, was the first bully. He bullied his brother Abel with the ultimate act of bullying by killing him.

Did you know that every one of us has the capability to be a bully? Some of us are a lot better at it than others. Some of us don't even know we are being bullied and some of us only know how to bully others.

Check out this no bullying sign. Notice on the lower half we have the typical things associated with bullying; hitting, kicking, name-calling, stealing, pushing, or damaging property. Bullies do those things. But notice on the upper side of this image. We don't typically associate these things with bullying but they are; rumors, teasing, leaving somebody out, gossiping, threats, mean words. Bullies do these things too



He's the thing the world is not (and never will be) big enough for even one bully. That's because bullies cause fear, and fear leads to worry, and worry leads to anger, and anger can cause us to do bad things to one another.

Bullies make us believe things about ourselves that are not true. They make us believe things about others that are not true. Bullies put Jesus on the cross. He knows what it's like to be bullied. And he knows a better way.

When I think of a bully I think of a guy let's call Jerry because that's his real name. Jerry was a class mate of mine in middle school & high school. He used to bully me and others all the time with mean and nasty words. He was somebody I loved to hate. Do you know someone like that?

Jerry taught me how hurtful words can be. I tried to deflect his hurtful words with phrases that I would play over and over in my mind, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." or "I am paper you are glue whatever you say bounces off of me and sticks to you." But those tapes in my head didn't really work.

Our words have lasting affect. I wonder whatever happened to Jerry. He was one bad apple.

They say that *one bad apple spoils the whole bunch*. And yet, Jesus says the opposite is true that *one good apple can change the whole bunch*. That's what Jesus did and that's what he teaches his disciples to do. That's what we hear Paul saying to the Christians living in Ephesus in our reading for today. (*Read Ephesians 4:13-34*)

This was when it was okay to treat others as you had been treated. It was okay to hate your enemy and your neighbor as well. It was okay to live by the mantra – "I don't get mad I get even." It was an eye for an eye world. But you know living in an eye for eye world causes everyone to be blind.

Jesus points out that God's grace is poured out for one and all. The sun rises on the good and the bad. The rain falls on the just and the unjust. God's love and grace and mercy and forgiveness are for everyone and they are to be our guide.

That's the basis for what Paul is saying to the Christians in Ephesus. He is teaching them (and us for that matter) that we need to encourage one another to grow up in the faith. To live the faith, to share the faith, to encourage more and more people to put their faith in Jesus.

We are a community of faith-filled believers who build up one another, are kind to each other, tenderhearted and forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven us. Notice that Ephesians doesn't imagine a world where everyone just sits around singing "kumbaya," where everyone is all lovey-dovey all the time. No it acknowledges our tendency to get angry.

Ephesians doesn't tell us to not get angry. Ephesians says go ahead! Get angry! But do not sin. Do not act on your anger. Anger isn't a sin. It's a God-given emotion telling us that something isn't right. Something has to change either with us or the other person or the situation.

For some people being kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving is a sign of weakness. But I have to tell you it takes real strength to do those things. It doesn't take much strength to spread rumors or gossip. It doesn't take much strength to tear down others. It takes strength to set aside our anger and encourage one another.

In a society that defines second place as the first loser, we have the unique calling to live by a better way. So I invite you to consider these three suggestions:

First, if you were a bully or have bullied someone, pray and seek guidance about apologizing to those you hurt. Find a way from this day forward to encourage life and not destroy it.

Second, if you were bullied or are being bullied now, talk about it with someone you trust, to encourage you and guide you in finding a way to forgive. Pray that God will give you the strength to do so in love.

Third, let's find a way to hold each other accountable for our words. Stop any rumors or gossip someone shares with you. Stop the cynicism that cuts down our church and society. Find a way to talk to a teacher or parent about someone that is being bullied – become a friend with that student or co-worker, or family member and share with them some encouraging words.

I was trying to find a good ending to this message. So this morning on the way here I was singing a song I tend to sing to my daughter at bed time along with a few others songs. We usually end with Amazing Grace and its cute how she sings along with me. Here's the song that was running through my mind this morning... *Home, home on the range where the deer and the antelope play. Where seldom is heard a discouraging word and the skies are not cloudy all day.*

The first time I sang that song my daughter said, "Dad what does discouraging words mean?" I responded, "Saying mean or nasty things to or about other people." "Oh. We shouldn't do that." She said. "No, we shouldn't..." I agreed.

So I changed the words to that song for us here this morning... *Home, home in the church where the children of God sing and pray, where seldom is heard a discouraging word and the glory of God shines every day.*

Here's the amazing thing about our words, they can tear down or build up. May we build up one another with the encouraging words we say this day and every day. In other words – Have fun. Learn a lot! Be nice to others! Amen.