

## **Eph 4:21-32, 5:1-2**

St Peter's 10-10-2010.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

What is the difference between the two trees shown on the screen? The one is sick, the other healthy. In fact, the first one is dead! What made the one sick and the other healthy? Just look at the sky! It is what comes from above – the rain!

Our watch word for this week says: *Heal me, Lord, and I will be healed. Save me and I will be saved.* This is a wonderful prayer. When I say this prayer, I own up to the fact that I am spiritually sick and need healing. I also know that there is healing in Christ – only in Christ, nowhere else.

We usually apply this only to ourselves – is that not very selfish? We also apply this only to our spiritual life – what about the body, the community, the society, the natural world?

You see, the author of the Letter to the Ephesians has got a completely different idea. It was probably one of the disciples of the Apostle Paul.

God is the Creator of the universe – and the universe is in trouble, nature is in trouble, society is in trouble, our communities are in trouble, our bodies are in trouble. It is not just a matter of our individual souls!

God has a vision – a great master plan. Ephesians 1 speaks about the great forces that rule over our reality. God has placed Christ, the great Healer, above these powers. It is a new world government, a new administration, and now the directors general are supposed to implement a new policy.

God wants to create a new humanity with Christ at the head. It is called the Body of Christ, governed by the Spirit of Christ. People are called to leave their old sick lives behind and join God's new healthy humanity. This is how they can get healed.

But once they are part of the new humanity, they are given spiritual tools to build up the Body of Christ, to bring it to maturity, to develop its full strength.

And then the Body of Christ, the new community, becomes a witness to the rest of the world – including the corrupt administrators who do not acknowledge Christ as their new president.

This is the great picture that the author of Ephesians paints before our eyes. You see, if he calls us to change our lives, it is not just for our own spiritual renewal.

God wants to heal his world, he wants to heal nature, society, our communities, our personal relationships, our jobs, our schools, our hospitals, our financial institutions, our enterprises, our trade unions, our sports bodies, our media, our judicial system – everything!

And he wants to begin with us. He has invited us to join this community, St Peter's. He has given us gifts to build up this community, so that this community can again become a witness to the world outside.

Must I emphasize again that our society needs healing? Almost half of our working population are unemployed; the income discrepancy between rich and poor is the highest in the world; we have the second lowest economic productivity in the world; people spend their money on luxuries they cannot afford; our population has to pay 75% of their monthly income to service their debts;

we have massive violence in our families; we have high incidents of rape, crime and drug addiction; corruption is rampant; we have teenage pregnancies; we have the highest HIV-infection in the world; we have thousands of AIDS orphans and thousands more to come .... and so I can continue.

This is not a pretty picture. This is what bothers our God. This is why God wants to create a new humanity. He calls us – each one of us – to join his redemptive project. Christian faith is not just about your personal lives – it is about God's mission.

I have a half-sister who is a high school teacher in a small town in Namibia.

We just received an email saying that she was invited to go to central China for three months and teach a group of Chinese the English language there. Wow!

Just imagine – the Chinese are ¼ of the world population. They are extremely hard working. They are disciplined. They are efficient. They are modest. They are ambitious. They are outcompeting the rich nations in the world today. Wow!

I am jealous of my sister; I want to see all that. But then I told myself: Hey Klaus, wait a minute! You have been called into a much, much greater project – God's own project, not for the Chinese, but for God's world, for our continent, for our country. Wow!

This is the chance of a life time. Pack your stuff and join up!

Friends this is a really big thing. It demands incredible human resources, intellectual resources, physical resources, financial resources. It requires commitment and dedication, it requires self-discipline. It requires the willingness to sacrifice some of our comforts and desires.

All this goes far beyond what we as individuals, communities or nations can do. We must do this together and everybody must pull his or her weight.

Put off your old dirty clothes and put on new clothes, the text says. We must **unlearn** and **relearn** a lot of things.

This is not easy; it takes an effort. When you want to become a doctor you have to study hard for many years. Our brains are conditioned to the old ways. They want to follow the crowd like sheep without thinking.

Old habits stick, new ways need to be nurtured. We need the support of a living community such as St Peters. Don't try to go at it alone!

Don't just carry on the way you lived – there are better ways of living your life. Don't be like a mule or a horse that has no understanding, our Psalm said. Our text mentions a few examples:

1. **Telling the truth.** Where there is no transparency there is no trust. Where there is no trust, suspicion poisons human relationships. No family, no community, no society can prosper under such circumstances.

Can you trust your boyfriend, your wife, your child to tell the truth? Can you trust the workers you have employed? Can you trust your boss?

A political party makes unrealistic promises before the election – houses and jobs and roads – and then does not deliver. The population feels deceived and becomes violent.

Why not be honest and say: we lack financial resources, trained personnel and administrative competence – let us cooperate and get out of the mess together. Then the constituency will understand and pull its weight.

2. **Anger is no solution.** Often our anger is based on arrogance – as if everybody must dance to our tunes. But anger can also be justified because people do things that are really wrong, detrimental or foolish.

But even if that is the case, anger is no solution. It makes the problem worse. It causes us to do the most foolish things – burning down our own trains, burning down our own schools, getting drunk, beating up our wives and kids, pulling the trigger of a gun and ending up in jail for life.

The correct way of dealing with a situation like this is to ask: how can I help the culprit see the light? Then you take responsibility for the person that angers you. You want to heal, not to destroy.

3. **Stealing is no solution.** According to the Bible, God wants us to make a living through honest work. Work should provide for all our needs. Those who think they can be parasites on the work of others, are sick in their mind.

However, at a time where so many people are unemployed this is a tricky issue. Not to be needed by anybody is extremely humiliating. I have written a little book on that.

If almost half our working population cannot be accommodated in the formal economy there is something seriously wrong with this economy. It just shows that it is not only individuals that are sick, but the whole society can be sick. .

But stealing is no solution. It destroys your integrity. It makes you guilty of an offence. You harm yourself and others.

Even if you cannot find a decent job – don't just sit and do nothing and depend on others, but make some positive contribution to the community and the society. This will restore your dignity, gain the respect of others and open up opportunities.

But it is not only the unemployed who are stealing. There are many ways of stealing. You can steal time and resources by not being in the office, not answering your telephone, coming late to meetings,

Of course, corruption is stealing and it is rampant in our society. Taking bribes, using facilities at work for private ends, allocating houses and tenders and jobs to home boys, friends and relatives. This is part of the old life that we must take off once and for all. There is no blessing on stealing.

**4. Destructive language can do much harm.** The way you speak can have incredible consequences. Hateful words can destroy marriages, communities, industrial relationships and political parties.

But constructive, helpful words can also build up relationships, families, communities, such as our congregation.

If your heart is full of bitterness, for heaven's sake do not pour it out and poison your relationships. Go home, confess to a brother or sister that you are angry and allow Christ to overcome your resentment through the spirit of forgiveness.

All this is not just decent behaviour. All this is being involved in God's great project to build a new humanity – beginning with you personally, with your family, your community, your congregation, your situation at work.

Our text says: Let us not disappoint the Holy Spirit. Indeed, let us not disappoint the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit of Christ, our Lord, who wants to heal us.

“Imitators of God” – “live in love” as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us – that is the basis! (5:1)

“Heal me Lord, then I will be healed. Help me and I will be helped” – this is how God heals us – by liberating us from self-imposed burdens!

What is Christ all about? Not moral regulations, but a new humanity

The cosmic context – new humanity

The communal context – the body of Christ

The gifts of the Spirit – to build up (apply to bishop, dean, pastor, kids church, elders, youth, PRC, PRCC etc)

learning Christ – the truth in Christ =

Taking off, putting on a new garment (a new opportunity, a new freedom, a new power, way of being human, a new way of life).

Other pictures: going through the river, jumping onto another train, plating a new crop, using a new computer technology (and outcompeting the others), a new political dispensation, a new car, moving house, finding a new route

Freedom rather than oppressive law:

The old as an unnecessary burden

Real problems and artificially created problems (drugs, teenage pregnancy, HIV infection, debt)

### **Wo ist das wirklich für mich?**

go through:

deluded by lust

falsehood (secret scheming, caucusing – transparency, honesty – let it come to light to see whether it is acceptable)

anger, wrath etc – mentioned twice

devil – accuser that finds reasons to attack

stealing (including time, entitlement mentality, productivity, corruption)

evil talk, slander – graceful words that build up,

grieving the Holy Spirit = concern for the other, not selfishness

wrangling

forgiveness – suffering, transforming acceptance of the unacceptable (apply to St Peters).

We concentrate on our own spiritual needs

God has the world in mind –

if you want to save nature, you need a new humanity

to renew humanity you start with a new community

a new community is made up of renewed individuals

who are called into the new community

they have been given gifts of grace to build up the community

don't try on your own – the Spirit is given to the community

and through the community to all its members.