

**Eastwood Uniting Church 8 August, 2021**

**Holy Communion**

Leader: Rev Dr Amelia Koh-Butler

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*We continue in our community reading of the Letter to the Ephesians.*

**Creating Community with God**

***Opening Song – I dream of a Church (Douglas Simper***) <https://youtu.be/UywHoXGaRqI>

I dream of a church where love is freely shown,

the peace of Christ is shared, the grace of God is known.

I dream of a church where young and old embrace,

affirming people’s gifts, a smile on every face.

I dream of a church where wealthy serve the poor,

the prejudice has gone, for love is now the law.

I dream of a church where pilgrims learn to pray,

the privileged and strong will give their power away.

I dream of a church where people are set free,

released from hate and pain, forgiveness is the key.

I dream of a church where Jesus calls our name.

the way, the truth, the life, there is no greater claim. Words and music: © Douglas A. Simper

***Lighting a candle***

Set our hearts on fire with love for you, O Christ our God  
So that in its flame we may love you with all our heart,  
With all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our strength, and our neighbours as ourselves. Amen.

用對神你的愛來點燃我們的心，我們的主基督 好讓我們在祂的火焰中、全心全意地愛你， 用我們全部心思、全部靈與魂、全部力量，我們和我們的鄰居一起。 阿門。

너는 마음을 다하고 정성을 다하고 뜻을 다하고 힘을 다하여 주 너의 하나님을 사랑하라.’

***Acknowledgement of Country and Greeting*** Sacred Footsteps

As we gather in this place, we give thanks for the First Peoples of the Lands we are on...

Wallemattegal, Barramattagal, Gurrunggai and others.  
We acknowledge the commitment their ancestors made,

across the generations, to nurturing this Land.  
Together, may we walk into the future,  
recognising the sacred footsteps that continue to lead us to the promise of Heaven.

Cooee Warami mittigar Come – you are welcome here

欢迎来到这里 오신 것을 환영합니다

nǐ hǎo 你好 Anyong haseyo 안녕하세요

**Call to Worship:**

*We gather, hoping … [A gathering prayer by Craig Mitchell]* <https://vimeo.com/580231910>

**We gather hoping for a glimpse of the holy**

the One who brooded over Creation

who engulfed a bush in flame

who made a path through the waters

who rolled away the tombstone

**We gather hoping for a whisper of the truth**

the Word who first spoke in the silence

the voice who raged with prophet’s zeal

the host who sang of peace on earth

the teacher who blessed humble and poor

**We gather hoping for a touch of compassion**

the tenderness that shaped the human body

the caress that opened eyes of the blind

the soothing hand that brought healing calm

the warmth that embraced lonely and lost

We gather in the presence of mystery of One who is revealed and hidden

known and unknown, mother of Creation, human God-with-us, living Word eternal Spirit

Three and One Breathe into us hope, faith and joy

Breathe into us compassion, truth and holiness

Breathe into us reconciliation, justice and peace

Breathe newness of life as we worship today

***A Prayer of Approach*** - **Opening Prayer** (based on Psalm 130) <https://vimeo.com/582037405>

Holy God, Creator of Life, you call us out of our dark places, offering us the grace of new life.  
When we see nothing but hopelessness, you surprise us with the breath of your spirit.  
Call us out of our complacency and routines, set us free from our self-imposed bonds,  
and fill us with your spirit of life, compassion, and peace,  
In the name of Jesus, your anointed one, we pray. **Amen.**

~ written by Rev. Nancy J., and posted on her **wonderings through life and other such nonsense.**<http://ruminari.wordpress.com/>

***A Prayer of Confession*** (read by Rev Ann Perrin) <https://youtu.be/l7DIcwyOBQw>

[If you used this prayer last week at home, there are more prayers attached at the end of this document]

O God, you know it is part of our humanness to long for infallible signs, especially when we are filled with doubt. Deep down, we realize that our relationship with you would not be free and respectful

if we simply followed your directions all the time.

***Surround us with your understanding, Jesus Christ.*** ***Lead us towards your grace, we pray.***

We know that you call us into living fully and growing in wisdom by reflecting on what we must do,

as we try to honour you in body, mind, heart and spirit.

***Surround us with your understanding, Jesus Christ.*** ***Lead us towards your grace, we pray.***

You know, O God, that to walk the straight road, which leads to life, is a complex journeying

between following our own convictions and being your humble servants.

***Surround us with your understanding, Jesus Christ.***

***Lead us towards your grace, we pray.*** ***Amen.***

*Words of Assurance*

Christ has walked our way of question and indecision.

The Holy God knows all that we face in each day and our frailty in choosing what we do.

Do not be afraid. We are forgiven!

***Thanks be to God.***

**Human and Divine – encountering Jesus Christ**

***Sacred Story from Scripture - Ephesians 4:25-5:2***

So then, putting away falsehood,

let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another.

Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil.

Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labour and work honestly with their own hands,

so as to have something to share with the needy.

Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up,

as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,

with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption.

Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander,

together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted,

forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children,

and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

For the letters that teach us about God’s peace and promises

- **Thanks be to God!**

***Message – Amelia Koh-Butler***

Today I was able to go out – it was very exciting! Having already taken a long walk, I even decided to drive rather than walk. Turning the car over felt like such an event!

When I arrived at my destination, I intentionally parked a block away, so I could walk the extra steps and make sure I was very socially distanced from others. I don’t know about you, but I even feel funny at the moment about parking my car in the vicinity of someone else’s car.

I don’t want to be in a position to compromise anyone else’s safety.

As an essential worker for people in their most vulnerable times,

I want to make sure I am a ‘safe person’ for when someone really needs me.

At my appointment, I was thrilled to be touched by someone else.

It was lovely to have a conversation with someone where I could actually appreciate their body language. I was at the Bloodbank giving blood. We all joked in there that it is probably the only place where you are encouraged to sit and eat a snack at the moment. It almost felt human!

People were careful and cautious, but they were also positive and encouraging.

Together, we were all part of a team that helps to give life by giving blood.

We all observed very strict COVID-safe practices, but we also knew what we were doing was good in a time when so much feels bad.

Luke was the phlebotomist (collector of blood) who attended to me.

We talked about family and lockdown and work.

He talked about how fulfilling his work is for him – knowing that he contributes to saving lives.

He is a believer and he prays for the people who give blood and for the people who will receive it.

My thinking this week has been influenced by reading an article

written by April Yamashaki, in the Christian Century, from a few years ago – 2015 I think.

In it, she reflected on her attitudes to work. Why work? She asks.

Is it mainly about meeting our own financial needs and buying things we want?

Is work meant to start after highschool or TAFE or uni and last until retirement,

when it’s replaced by golf or bowls or travel? Or Perhaps grey-nomading?

Should I be looking to let someone else have my job, someone who might need it more than I do?

Ephesians outlines a number of rules for living the new life in Christ:

put away falsehood, speak the truth, be kind, forgive one another.

Work comes up in 4:28, which, though addressed to former thieves, is relevant to others as well: “Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labour and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy.”

So, we are to work honestly. Thieves must give up stealing; likewise, unfair employers must pay their workers fairly, workers who come in late and leave early are challenged to give an honest day’s work,

and people who pad their expense accounts must stop.

The reason for working is at least partly financial: we work so that we don’t need to steal.

[But that leaves me with the question – what about the people who cannot work or who cannot find work? Do we expect them to steal to survive?]

We are to work with our hands. There is something about sticking our hands in the dirt of our gardens

or kneeding bread or knitting jumpers or finishing a woodwork project,

but there is also something about typing or using a pen on a card or picking up a phone.

In our information age, we might add that we are to work with our minds,

our creativity, our skill, our education, our passion.

God created us to be creative—to care for the earth like a garden,

to name the animals, to create community with one another.

Work is meant to engage one’s whole self, and we are meant to engage our work.

We work because we are made in the image of God. We work so that we can share with those in need.

The text takes the consumerism of our society and stands it on its head.

We don’t work primarily to keep up with our neighbours or to upgrade our house.

We don’t work so that we can buy ourselves the latest toys or make ourselves ever more comfortable.

We work so that we have something to share with other people.

We work to be able to offer blessing – to be able to give.

In this text, I find the answer to at least some of my questions. Why work?

Not just to meet our own needs and desires but to keep ourselves honest,

to exercise our God-given creativity, and to share with others.

Is work meant to end at retirement?

No—our activities may change once our formal work life is over,

but creative, purposeful activity continues as long as our health allows it.

As Dorothy Sayers puts it:

Work is not, primarily, a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do.

It is, or it should be, the full expression of the workers’ faculties,

the thing in which they find spiritual, mental and bodily satisfaction,

and the medium in which they offer themselves to God.

The Ephesians text also raises additional work-related questions. When I purchase the cheapest product available, am I actually stealing from workers who are paid unfairly for their labour?

How will I limit my consumption and share more with people in need?

Should I only use my earnings to spend on things that can be verified as FairTrade?

How can I begin to assess what difference my voluntary or paid work makes to others?

Does my work contribute to fairness and justice in society or do my spending patterns prop up a consumerism that takes advantage of the most vulnerable?

I can’t answer these questions with any finality. They are ongoing questions to ponder and wrestle with,

questions to answer in living and working day by day. So I continue to live into my work and into my questions, with partial answers for today and hope for tomorrow.

***Servant Song*** <https://youtu.be/Py8xUO7pOeY>

What do you want of me, Lord?  
Where do you want me to serve you?  
Where can I sing your praises.  
I am your song.  
Jesus, Jesus, you are the Lord.  
Jesus, Jesus, you are the way.  
  
I hear you call my name, Lord,  
and I am moved within me.  
Your Spirit stirs my deepest self.  
Sing your songs in me.  
Jesus, Jesus, you are my Lord.  
Jesus, Jesus, you are the way.  
  
Above, below, and around me,  
before, behind and all through me,  
your Spirit burns deep within me.  
Fire my life with your love.  
Jesus, Jesus, be the warmth of my heart.  
Jesus, Jesus, you are the way.  
  
You are the light in my darkness.  
You are my strength when I'm weary.  
You give me sight when I'm blinded.  
Come see for me.  
Jesus, Jesus, you are my light.  
Jesus, Jesus, you are the way.  
  
I am your song and servant,  
singing your praise like Mary.  
Surrendered to your Spirit,  
"Let it be done to me."  
Jesus, Jesus, "Let it be done to me."  
Jesus, Jesus, you are the way.

***Offering –*** Our Bank Account details are as follows:   Eastwood UC Account    BSB: 634 634      Account #: 100020668

In gratitude for life and resources, we offer ourselves in your service, O God of generosity.

May our lives and ways of living become part of your gift to the world. AMEN

**Empowering the Community’s Spirit**

***Gospel - John 6:35, 41-51***

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said,

"I am the bread that came down from heaven."

They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?

How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?"

Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves.

No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me;

and I will raise that person up on the last day.

It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.'

Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.

Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father.

Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life.

I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.

This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever;

and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

***A picture containing text, painting

Description automatically generated***

***A Reflection on the Gospel Reading and preparation of Bread***

The Gospel reading for this Sunday is [John 6:24-35](http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=213): “… Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’…”

The Hebrew word manna means “What is it?”! Whatsit?!

Exodus 16:15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “**What is it?**”

For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.”

Exodus 16:33 **And Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar, and put an omer of whatsit in it,**

**and place it before the LORD, to be kept throughout your generations.”**

It is a good invitation to consider the Eucharist. What is it?

Like light, modelled as waves and particles, there are different models for what it is – the Eucharist.

The word Eucharist means THANKSGIVING. The Great Prayer that starts the Communion part of a service is called the Eucharistic Prayer of the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving. In that Prayer, we form community before God, retell and give thanks for God’s story and re-enact the ritual in order to re-member the Body of Christ – that is – to reform the membership of the community of God.

There are a bunch of competing ideas about how this ritual works:

***Transubstantiation***

This goes back to the philosophy of Aristotle (384 BCE – 322 BCE), distinguishing substance and characteristics.

A chair may consist of four legs, three legs; be made of plastic, wood, metal; be coloured blue, black, brown – these are the “characteristics” of a chair, not the “chairness” (substance) of the chair.

God, being God, can change the substance of something so that the characteristics remain the same. It has all the characteristics of bread, but the substance is Christ.

While such categories are lessening in importance for many of us, “transubstantiation” is a way of indicating belief in the “Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist”. It is a mystery HOW Christ is present, but a way of thinking about it is to see the people who share in this meal with you. They re-present the Body of Christ and share in the meal of Christ.

**Praise and glory to you creator Spirit of God; you make our bread Christ’s body  
to heal and reconcile and to make us the body of Christ.  
You make our wine Christ’s living sacrificial blood to redeem the world. You are truth…**

***Consubstantiation***

It is both bread and Christ. **We break this bread to share in the body of Christ…**

***Transignification***

We take some cloth, stitch it to some other cloth… it is a flag we are willing to die for; get teary-eyed about at the Olympics… We take some gold, form it into a ring…  
We take some paper, print something on it; now, for many, it becomes their highest value – money.  
We alter the significance of something. Its significance to us.

**“Send your Holy Spirit that these gifts of bread and wine which we receive may be to us the body and blood of Christ…”**

***Memorialism***

What is important is what happens in our minds – not what we receive in our mouths.

**“Take and eat this, in remembrance that Christ died for us, and feed on him in thy heart by faith with thanksgiving.”**

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Different individuals and denominations may focus on or stress one of these models. There is a mysterious reality – each model has some truth to teach us. Queen Elizabeth I said it well:

**Twas God the word that spake it, He took the bread and brake it;  
And what the word did make it; That I believe, and take it.**

***Sacramental Response –* Holy Communion**

***Passing the Peace – in Auslan*** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q1XtTL_StXc>

***Song – Is the Lord with us?*** <https://youtu.be/ILt2Q1b4Ozg>

**Invitation to the Table** 前来圣餐桌的邀 성찬으로의 초대

we welcome all people 我们欢迎所有人 모두를 환영합니다

Thanksgiving 感恩 감사

God be with you 愿主与你们同在 하나님이 함께 하시길

and also with you 也与你的心灵同在 당신과도 함께 하시길

lift up your hearts 请举心向上 여러분의 마음을 바치십시요

We lift them up to God 我们全心归向上主 우리의 마음을 하나님께 바칩니다

Let us give thanks to the Risen Christ

讓我們感謝復活的基督 부활하시 그리스도께 감사드립시다

It is right to give our thanks and praise

我們的感謝和讚 美是理所當然的 감사와 찬양을 드리는 것이 옳습니다

we give thanks for friends and strangers

我们感谢朋友和陌生人 친구들과 낯선 이들로 인해 감사를 드립니다

we give thanks for justice, love, peace and freedom

我们感谢公正、关爱、和平和自由 정의, 사랑, 평화 그리고 자유로 인해 감사를 드립니다

we give thanks for life that has brought us to this moment in time

我们感谢生命将我们带到这一刻 우리를 때 맞춰 지금 이순간으로 이끈 삶으로 인해 감사를 드립니다

we remember the stories from our tradition...

我们记得这些来自 于我们传统的故事…. 우리의 전통에서 나온 이야기들을 기억합니다…

we remember how Jesus had a meal with his disciples

我们记得耶稣是怎样与他的门徒们一起用餐的 예수께서 그의 제자들과

어떻게 식사를 하셨는지 기억합니다

Jesus broke bread and gave it to them

耶稣掰开面包并递给了他们 예수께서 떡을 떼시고 그것을 그들에게 주셨습니다

this is my body given for you 这是我的身体 给予你们 이것은 너희를 위한 나의 몸이다

each time you do this, remember me

每次你们做这件事的时候, 都要记住我 이것을 행할 때마다, 나를 기억하라

Jesus passed a cup of wine to his friends

耶稣把酒递给了 他的朋友们 예수께서 그의 친구들에게 포도주 잔을 건네셨습니다

this is my love and blood poured out for you

这是我的爱和血液，倒给你们 이것은 너희를 위해 쏟은 나의 사랑이고 보혈이다

each time you do this, remember me

每次你们做这件事的时候,都要记住我 이것을 행할 때마다, 나를 기억하라

together may we re-imagine the world

但愿我们可以一 起重新构想这个世界 함께 세상을 다시 상상하기를 기원합니다

together may we work to make all things new

但愿我们可以 一起努力将 一切都更新 함께 일해서 모든 것을 새롭게 할 수 있기를 기원합니다

together may we celebrate possibilities and hope

希望我们可以一 起赞颂可能性和希望 함께 가능성과 희망을 송축하기를 기원합니다

**Bread and Wine** 圣餐 떡과 포도주

We break open the story! 我們擘开這故事！ 그 이야기를 시작합니다!

We share the promise! 我們分享這應許！ 그 약속을 나눕니다!

The body of Christ keep you in eternal life

基督的身体使你们永生 그리스도의 몸이 여러분을 영생에 머물게 합니다

The love of Christ keep you in eternal life

基督的爱使你们永生 그리스도의 사랑이 여러분을 영생에 머물게 합니다

***Song for our future – All are welcome!*** <https://youtu.be/W3Pb77ylz_Q>

This is normally a Gathering song, but this week we sing it as a song to pin our hopes and aspirations on. We are working to become more welcoming. We are asking God to prepare our hearts and minds to be welcomers to God’s community, not just at church, but in our everyday lives.

Let us build a house where love can dwell  
and all can safely live,  
a place where saints and children tell  
how hearts learn to forgive.  
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,  
rock of faith and vault of grace;  
here the love of Christ shall end divisions.  
All are welcome, all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.  
  
Let us build a house where prophets speak,  
and words are strong and true,  
where all God’s children dare to seek  
to dream God’s reign anew.  
Here the cross shall stand as witness  
and as symbol of God’s grace;  
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus.  
All are welcome, all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.  
  
Let us build a house where love is found  
in water, wine and wheat:  
a banquet hall on holy ground  
where peace and justice meet.  
Here the love of God, through Jesus,  
is revealed in time and space;  
as we share in Christ the feast that frees us.  
All are welcome, all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.  
  
Let us build a house where hands will reach  
beyond the wood and stone  
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,  
and live the Word they’ve known.  
Here the outcast and the stranger  
bear the image of God’s face;  
let us bring an end to fear and danger.  
All are welcome, all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.  
  
Let us build a house where all are named,  
their songs and visions heard  
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed  
as words within the Word.  
Built of tears and cries and laughter,  
prayers of faith and songs of grace,  
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter.  
All are welcome, all are welcome,  
all are welcome in this place.  
  
Text: Marty Haugen, b. 1950, © 1994 GIA Publications, Inc. Tune: TWO OAKS (see RW #219)

***Prayers for Home***

*A Prayer of Thanksgiving*

I give thanks.  
Thanks for those who have served. Thanks for those who serve now.  
Thanks for the possibilities that call us all forth.  
Thanks for memories that sustain and offer comfort.  
Thanks for sunrise and sunset, for music and art and good food.  
Thanks for laughter and tears.  
Thanks for understanding.

*A Simple Prayer for Others*

I pray for Emergency Workers and those who did not expect to be Emergency Worlers:  
- for GPs and their staff  
- for Clinicians and Pathologists  
- for Ambos and Paramedics,  
- for Posties and Pharmacists,  
- for Triage and Testing Centre staff,  
- for Parking Attendants and Security Personnel,  
- for Nurses, Nursing Aides, Porters, Transport staff,  
- for Phebotomists (clinical vampires!) who take blood and those who collect swabs.  
  
I pray for those who are afraid to come to work, but come anyway.  
I pray for those who are tired and anxious.  
I pray for those who suffer hesitation or self-doubt.  
I pray for those who are daily learning new ways.

*The practice of quarantine, as we know it, began during the 14th century in an effort to protect coastal cities from plague epidemics. Ships arriving in Venice from infected ports were required to sit at anchor for 40 days before landing. This practice, called quarantine, was derived from the Italian words quaranta giorni which mean 40 days.*  
.....

For fourteen days of Isolation – to pray in solidarity for people in full quarantine. The idea is that you pray a prayer each day and keep repraying the same words throughout the day.

1 Let me begin with you, O God, For you are every beginning, the Author of all life.

2. As I take a breath and plan the coming days, Guide my thinking and my planning.

3.  Remind me who you are  and what you have done  
And what you promise...  
Mostly, let me remember your promise of eternal Life!

4. As I wonder what is still to come, I humbly ask:  
Please don’t let me be sick. Built if I do, help me get through it without putting others at risk.

5.  Give me grace when I get cross with others. Give me patience when I get frustrated with myself.

6.  Let me celebrate this day - it was given by you - and you have placed me in it.  
May this day be a day of blessings.

7. May I rest in your arms, O God.

8. As I approach the phases of continuing this discipline   
I take the opportunity to spiritually stocktake my life.  
Show me, Lord, your ways - teach me your paths.

9. How can I reflect you today, Lord? What if your creativity finds a place in my soul?

10. Are you doing a new thing today, O God? What has died in the life I once knew?   
What must I bury and leave behind? What will emerge from these days (and weeks)?

11. So many questions, O God... So few answers...  
I struggle with the way forward. I wonder. I wait. I wait upon you.

12. Is this my time of rest and renewal.  
It feels a little frustrating, but I have entered a new rhythm.  
Is this a new form of monasticism. Did you like that era, O God?  
Are you inviting us into a deeper companionship?

13. In this Baker’s dozen, I am trying something new today.  
I pray - I wait - I listen for the sounds of holiness and sanctification.  
Are you changing me? Is my body strengthening? Do I feel cleansed?

14. I have had a detox of sorts. I have learnt to be with myself and you.  
I did not know their intimacy and even now I am unsure what this holy friendship means.  
I rely on you to take us forward - you and I.  
Bring me into tomorrow.  
Amen

***Extra material for Devotional times at home***

If one first encounters Ephesians 4:25—5:2 without considering its contextual moorings, its string of behavioural instructions can come across as an extended, alternating list enumerating the appropriate “dos” and “don’ts” Christians are called either to adopt or to avoid. While it is quite true that this text presents contrasting negative and positive behaviours, it is important to recognize that the exhortations listed here are grounded in the fundamental understanding that one’s reality (“who” a person is) empowers and is reflected in one’s conduct (“what” a person does). More specifically, a review of the “you were, but now you are” contrast in 4:17-24 helps one to grasp more fully the contrast of negative and positive behavioural appeals in 4:25—5:2.

Earlier in this letter, its audience was given an extensive, contrasting overview regarding their former reality and their current reality. Rather bluntly, they were told:

“So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by those who are called ‘the circumcision’—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:11-13).

Thus, their old reality was one of utter alienation from God, from Christ, from God’s people; a reality in which they were completely helpless and hopeless with regard to their own standing before God. In the immediate context of 4:25-5:2, this former reality is depicted as the “old self” (4:22; NRSV, NIV). In accord with the divine plan set down before creation, however, God changed their old reality through Christ’s death so that the audience now dwells in Christ (1:3-11; 2:4-10,14-22). In our text’s immediate context, this new reality is depicted as the “new self” (4:24; NRSV, NIV). Because Ephesians operates with a theological scheme in which one’s reality empowers and shapes one’s conduct, the audience has been called upon not to live (or even discern) as they once were, for example, as alienated Gentiles, but to live (and discern) as they now are, the new self which has been created according to God’s likeness (4:17-24).

The so-called “don’ts” and “dos” of 4:25-5:2, build upon and make more particular the contrasting interrelationship of how one’s reality determines and is reflected in one’s conduct.  The audience is called upon to “put away falsehood” (4:25) because relating to others through deceptions and lies was part and parcel of the old self’s way of life. Similar negative behaviours reflective of the former reality which are to be discarded like old clothing include “bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, slander, and malice” (4:31). It is also important to note that here in Ephesians not only is one’s conduct reflective of one’s reality but one’s conduct is also communal. In that way, the negative behaviours to be shunned are not simply bad actions according to some general or abstract moral standard. Rather, they are understood to be the negative, interpersonal ways Christian neighbours are no longer to relate to one another. Hence, the foundational drumbeat of our unity in the one body of Christ established and sounded throughout 4:1-16 remains the cadence for how we live out such unity in our ongoing interrelationships with each other as members of one another (4:25).

The interpersonal scope of these behavioural instructions may help in understanding the directives and their motivations presented in 4:26-30. 4:26a concedes that being upset with another person is an aspect of living in community, but such anger is neither to be the springboard for sinful actions against others nor for smouldering, lingering attitudes toward others (verse 26b).

Such actions and attitudes only open the door for the destructive schemes of the devil (verse 27; 6:11). Similarly, theft does not just involve taking something that belongs to another. Such theft robs another the ability of using their skills to produce what can also be shared with those in need (4:28). Likewise, what we say to each other directly impacts our relationships with each other as joint members of the body of Christ.

Thus in 4:29 we are being called upon to speak to each other in ways which enhance our relational bonds steeped in God’s grace rather than in ways which corrode these bonds (on the “building up” of the body and its bonds also see 2:21; 4:12,16).

Interwoven into the edifying behaviours which build up the ties that bind joint members of the body of Christ is a triune motivational base. In baptism, the Spirit first imprinted onto us the divine promise of our full, future salvation (the “sealing” with the Spirit in 4:30 recalling 1:13-14). Hence, we are being called upon not to engage in detrimental conduct which would thwart or frustrate the promised goals for which the Spirit is working (thus the exhortation “do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God” in verse 30). This would include avoiding the negative, interpersonal behaviours listed in verse 31 while engaging in the uplifting behaviours listed in verse 32a.

Thus, our text is calling us to be imitators of God in the mode of Christ (4:32b—5:2). Such a call to imitate God is not only unique in the New Testament, it may immediately sound an impossible ideal which we cannot possibly emulate. Actually, the acts of imitation presented here are rather concrete (both as a foundation and as action). We are to forgive each other because (and as) God first forgave us in the person and action of Christ (4:32b). We are to love each other because (and as) God first loved us in the person and action of Christ (5:1). We are to live selfless, God-pleasing lives as Christ lived selflessly to fulfill God’s salvific designs for us (5:2). Through these ways of living, our comportment stands in congruity with the grace-filled activity of God, of Christ, and of the Holy Spirit.