

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

## A Fragrant Life

There are a lot of terms that have come up in recent years that are new and often I find I am behind on what many of them mean. With all due respect to the women with the name Karen, some of whom I call friends, and an entire culturally distinct group of people from Myanmar who are kind and generous, who are Karens, I had to look up what a "Karen" was. If you don't know what that term refers to, I leave it to you to do the homework.

Growing up in an era of CBC National news with Peter Mansbridge and CTV news with Lloyd Robertson I never imagined a day when a former president would be claiming that anyone in the news media that disagreed with his take or opinion was fake news. Or that there would be 24-hour news channels just trying to make the ratings with whatever they can think of to call news.

Another term that seems to have no strict definition is cancel culture. I recently went to the online Urban Dictionary to find a definition of Cancel Culture. This is what I found,

"Cancel Culture: A modern internet phenomenon where a person is ejected from influence or fame by questionable actions. It is caused by a critical mass of people who are quick to judge and slow to question. It is commonly caused by an accusation, whether that accusation has merit or not. It is a direct result of the ignorance of people caused by communication technologies outpacing the growth in available knowledge of a person."<sup>1</sup>

Wow! There is a lot there to unpack, but my main point today is that cancel culture is pretty much the antithesis of Christian culture. Or at least it should be. And it affects more than the rich and famous, as everyone from janitors to professors, who find themselves or their words taken out of context, can suddenly be out of work or boycotted.

Sadly, the internet has given a larger platform to many, Christian and not, who think it is important that what they understand is truth and should be called out, get some air time. And to be fair, the first line of our scripture reading states, "putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours." Some take this to mean that we are to tell people "Like it is" whether they like it or not, and that we have a responsibility to let people know when they have it wrong.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Cancel%20Culture>. Accessed August 9, 2021.

I can tell you that I have had that thought on occasions to numerous to mention in the last couple of years as I scroll through my Facebook feed, or get caught up in a rabbit hole of people going back and forth in the comments of a social media posting. Politics, black lives matter, sexual orientation, policing, residential schools, vaccinations, or anything to do with Covid, one could go on...the number of topics with people trying to shout the “truth” is deafening.

Still, we are told to put away falsehood and all of us speak the truth to our neighbours. What is missing is the rest of the guidelines for living with others, the biggest piece of which is “we are members of one another”. This isn’t about just one thing, all of the topics I mentioned and more are important and need attention. We forget is that we are community, and the church is about Christian community. I am going to read more of this scripture again and ask you to listen with an ear for how what we do and say impacts others for better or for worse, and to hear, as Christians, how we might strive to be imitators of God, seeing everyone as a beloved child of God, living in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.

So, after the piece about speaking the truth, the writer of the letter to the Ephesians goes on to say, “Be angry but do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil.” The recognition here is that anger is something we all experience. It is when our anger hurts another, causing you to be a perpetrator of pain to another human being, physically or emotionally, then you have gone to far. For lack of a better way to explain what has gone on, you have made room for the devil. Use your anger in ways that move you and others to make the world a better place where people are fed, and housed, and safe.

The letter continues with something that might sound like common sense to most of us. “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.” Most of you watching this (or reading this) are Christians. You have grown up with the Ten Commandments, and you know that stealing is against the law, both religious law and the law of the land, so one might wonder what this is about. Why does it need mentioning?

But remember that this letter was written to Gentiles who did not grow up knowing these things, stealing was not right, but they had to be taught that to be Christ like one should earn their living honestly and that to give to others through your own generosity honours not only God and others, but also creates a sense of value in one’s own being. Trusting that who we are and what we give from the work of our hands brings about a transformed experience of well-being and participation in God’s mission in the world.

And in this time that we are living through, if everyone of us repeated the next verse everyday, maybe, just maybe, we would begin to speak as people who care about others regardless of whether they agree with us or not. If people knew that we were Christians by the way we built others up, now that would be something to strive for. As

is written, “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.” (2:29)

I repeat, “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 – may give grace - to those who hear.”

Remember that first line about speaking the truth to our neighbours. That is in the context of only saying what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that our words may give grace to those who hear. Remember, your need to speak and another’s need to hear your “words of wisdom” may be two different things, and thinking about that before we open our mouths is helpful.

This does not mean, keep your mouth shut. If there is injustice, pain, inequity, these are things that Christians are to call out. Don’t be silent, but build the community up with not only your words, but your actions as well. Support those initiatives that bring about transformed lives in our church, in our outreach, and in the community, in whatever ways God has called you to bring good and grace into the world.

Once again, we are reminded that these words, though words of wisdom for anyone, were specifically written to the Christian community, “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption.” This is about baptism. When we are baptized, we are given the seal of the Holy Spirit. We still have choices to make about how we live, hence all these other thoughts about how to speak and act, but we strive to be loving and grace filled. Baptism is the mark of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit moving in and through the church is the mark of Christian community.

There is yet more to be said about how we live together; it hits at the heart of our self-righteous anger and desire to be heard. If we are going to strive to be imitators of God, as beloved children, then “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.” Pretty plain talk. As Christians we know this is how we should walk in the world, but some days it is a pretty tall order. Still, through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, each day we should be more and more transformed into this kind of community and individuals within it.

Last week one of our hymns was “We are one in the Spirit” in which each verse ends with the refrain, “And they’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love, and they’ll know we are Christians by our love.” Love, grace, forgiveness, words that build up, all marks of a Christian and Christian community who desire to be a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

May our living be a fragrance that draws others into the love of God, like a hot apple pie coming from the oven, the warm embrace of a loved one, or the fresh air after a warm summer rain cleanses the earth. May we be that fragrant offering. Amen.