

“Reboot”

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

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“Be imitators of God...”

- Ephesians 5:1

Prayer of Preparation

In the name of the living God, we pray: to become more like your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

Meditation

Here is a little vocabulary quiz to begin a new year: How many words do you think there are in the English language that start with the prefix “re”?

Well, I looked it up in one of those great big, unabridged dictionaries at the library, the one that weighs about 10 pounds; and, to my surprise, I discovered that there are a little over 2,000 official “re” words in the dictionary. That’s 46 straight pages of nothing but words that start with prefix “re”. That’s like looking up “Smith” in the New York City phonebook, for those of you who know what a phonebook is. The prefix “re” means “again” or “to go back to.” For there to be so many words in our language starting with “re,” means that it is pretty important.

Indeed, at this time of year, when we flip the page so to speak – it is important to consider that little prefix “re,” especially by focusing on one of those 2,000 words: *reboot*. It is a word that was coined in the 1850s, which meant literally to *reboot*: when you wore out your bootstraps, and you needed ones, you had to *reboot*.

Today, of course, the word “reboot” is more oriented to computers: if you are having problems with your computer, maybe something is not working well, you *reboot*: you turn it off, and then turn it back on again, resetting the software and hardware.

Perhaps if you are like me, the term fosters images of frustration with technology. Maybe even anger. You are not just ready to *reboot*, but you are ready to stick the old foot through the screen!

To be sure, I want to be careful with the notion of *rebooting*; it is a term that involves a mechanical or a technological image to what is a very human dilemma; after all, we are not robots. And yet, as I am using the word this morning, I think there is something to the idea of *returning to* or *rebuilding on* some of the key convictions of the gospel, as we begin 2022, to look “again” at the software we need to upload if we are going to live faithfully. In fact, Christianity has always been about God *renewing* us in Christ. *Rebooting* is analogous to such theological words as *reforming* or *restoring*. We all stand in need of reformation and restoration – renewal.

Therefore, to get at how we go about *rebooting*, I want to focus on one scripture now and another at the end: the first scripture is from Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, which we read a moment ago; the other is from John’s Gospel on the feeding of the five thousand.¹

To the first text: Several weeks ago, we spoke about the prophets of Israel putting the grease where the squeak is and addressing the problems of faithlessness. In our passage today, the apostle Paul is doing something very similar. In a list of behaviors that concerns the Ephesians, Paul is clear about where the grease goes, or what he expects in terms of discipleship. Note the list of vices and then note the list of virtues. Note what he says Christians need to give up and take off and what they need to give up and take off.

Lying? Put it away. Instead, speak the truth in love (4:25).

Anger? Don’t let it consume you and lead you into doing something or saying something you will regret. Notice that Paul doesn’t say “don’t have anger.” He says, “Don’t let it get the best of you. Don’t let it damage relationships. That only leaves room for Satan to bring more damage, not just to others, but to yourself. Don’t let it eat at your soul” (4:26-27). In fact, remember that when you use hurtful speech, you only allow for more pain; you are only giving the devil a foothold; and not only that, but you are disappointing God’s Spirit (4:28).

¹ Sam Well’s sermon “Be Angry, But Do Not Sin” at Pulaski Heights UMC in Little Rock, Arkansas on March 1, 2019.

I can't help but wonder if Paul might have been one of the first depth psychologists, for he writes about the ways in which bitterness, rage, anger, hate, stealing, evil speech – can lead a person, and a community – to a dead end. These vices tell of bondage, not freedom; they speak of what is false, not of what is true.

I think it was my grandmother who said that bitterness is the pill you swallow in the hope that your enemy will get sick. I think she was right.

It is why Paul speaks of kindness as the key virtue to imitating God, or to being like Christ; it is the relational key to forgiving others. In fact, it is the key to understanding and accepting Christ's sacrifice (5:1-2). In short, kindness is the key to imitating God. In other words, without kindness, there is no way you can give your consent to following Jesus, or to receiving God's grace. The whole journey into God's heart suddenly comes to an end. It is why kindness is always the prelude to more of God.²

As a personal note, I would share with you that this is where I wrestle with God myself, where I need to reboot: it is always much easier to be angry and bitter than to be kind and generous. Anger and bitterness can make us think we are in control, but in reality, they act like chokeholds on the soul, as they do not allow the Spirit to work. There is no hospitality, no humility, no room for God. Anger, as Paul says, when left unchecked, can lead to sin. Kindness, on the other hand, can be a prelude to more, to more of God.³

Miraculous Food

In fact, I think it is a key to understanding our second passage where Jesus feeds the five thousand and where he says, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."⁴

In John's Gospel, the people have seen Jesus provide a miraculous food supply from a handful of loaves and fishes. The questions that arise in their hearts are the same as were in the Israelites' hearts after God sent the manna in the wilderness. It is a miracle I am sure that they would have liked to institutionalize: How can we make it into a program?

² N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2002), 53.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Thanks to Sam Wells for these insights in his sermon "Be Angry, But Do Not Sin."

Jesus' reply, of course, is, "You can't." In fact, he pretty much says, "If you have me, you have all you need, so stop trying to make me into someone or something I am not – a system, a plan, a theory. In me, there will always be enough. In me, you need never be hungry or go thirsty. In me, there is always more. Shape your heart according to my heart, and you'll see what I can do."⁵

The question is, "Do you really believe that?"

In other words, I can't help but think that there were folks in the crowd that day who didn't. I could be wrong, but I wonder if there were sceptics who ate the bread and fish even as Jesus blessed and gave the bread and fish. Indeed, there might have been a few who were angry or jealous; or maybe there were folks who could not see beyond their own breadcrumbs to what God was doing. It is difficult to know. What we *do know* is that Jesus fed people. What we *do know* is that Jesus changed people, converted people; amidst all the other choices they had, Jesus got a hold of them, offering a whole new way of life.

I suppose it raises a question for us: there is always going to be someone trying to convert us, so why not let it be Jesus. There is always going to be someone wanting to feed us something, so why not feed on what Jesus gives?

Maybe it is why, amidst all the choices we face, we need to hear Jesus' words again: "I am the bread of life." Maybe we need to realize that with such bread there will always be enough; that with Christ our hope lies in our ability to trust in what God is providing.

This is not something we need to fear, even though we are afraid and anxious most of the time. No, it is something we can believe. It is what Jesus is saying to the five thousand; and it is what Paul is saying to Ephesians: that in Christ, God provides.

And if you really want to discover this truth, then live in openness and kindness; live the love and forgiveness you have received from God. In doing so, as Paul says earlier in Ephesians, you will receive more than you can ever possibly imagine (Ephesians 3:14-15). I believe that this is one of the most radical convictions you can have as a Christian, especially in the face of a mindset of scarcity and disbelief and anger and cynicism.

⁵ Ibid.

It is also one of the hardest faith convictions to turn into daily practice: to trust that Jesus will provide, especially when you cannot immediately see *Jesus providing* in thirty-minutes or less.

Church: God has given us Jesus, as a sacrifice, as bread, as an example to imitate, revealing to us what a true life looks like rebooted in him – having access to God's grace and receiving more than enough. I suppose the next step at the beginning of a new year is really yours: Do you believe what Jesus says and who he is, or not? Do you believe it or not? Amen.