

Ephesians 4:31-32
“Facing One Another”
Lent 4 Mid-week

March 29, 2017
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
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Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen! Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

[Introduction] “I can read your face like a book!”

I am told that all the time. Maybe you’ve heard the same thing.

Any number of positive interactions between you and another person
can put a smile upon your face.

Any number of negative interactions between you and another person
can put a scowl upon your face.

Whether we like it or not, our facial expressions betray us.

Maybe you just received a promotion at work.

Maybe you returned from an excellent Spring Break trip.

Maybe your first grandchild was born.

And you just cannot wipe that smile off your face.

Maybe someone forgot to take out the trash last night.

Maybe someone said something that bothered you as you rushed out the door.

Maybe a driver cut you off on the way to work.

And you just cannot wipe that frown off your face.

That just might be where the phrase “Grin and bear it” comes from.

If we just smile and look pleasant through an awkward event or difficult ordeal,
oftentimes we can make it through it just fine

and perhaps the experience turns out to be better

than we could have ever thought.

[Face to Face]

Do you remember when Moses came down the mount?

He has been gone for 40 days and 40 nights.

The people had grown restless waiting,

but when Moses came something was different.

Moses's face shown!

Having seen the glory of God, just even the backside, Moses's face shown!

We, too, have the glory of God shining forth from our faces!

Just like the Israelites could see that glory of God in Moses' face,

the people we encounter can – very often – see the glory of God in our faces.

And they know that we have been in contact with him.

They know that through prayer and devotion and Scripture reading and meditation,
we are in contact with God.

At least that is the ideal.

But as we all know, our faces often reflect the ugliness of sin,

and people can see that in our faces as well,

as we deal with people

when we are angry or upset or aggravated with another.

Our faces can say to people,

“Go away!” or ***“I don't want to see you”*** or ***“Turn around.”***

And for those walls, those fronts we have put up between us and others,

we must confess.

We must admit to God and to one another

that our faces and our behavior toward others

do not always reflect the glory of God.

But the good news is

The good news is that faces have the ability to change expressions,
and change quickly!

God has the ability to make a quick turnaround too!

From sinful expressions to sincere expressions of joy.

[At the Cross]

We see the reality of this change happen at the foot of the cross.

The people were shaking their heads and looking at the ground
while Jesus hung on the cross.

But Jesus told his beloved disciple John and his mother to look at each other,
to behold one another,
and to form a special bond with one another.

Mary was to be a mother to John, and John a son to Mary.

Jesus declared it!

And the Bible says John took Mary into his home after this.

It is significant to note that the Bible says that after this exchange,
Jesus knew that “all was now finished” (John 19:28).

The last piece of the puzzle was in place.

Jesus had made sure that the relationship
between his two closest loved ones on earth was secured.

And Jesus wishes the same for our relationships.

He wants our relationships with one another to be secure in him.

He wants us to reach out in love to one another,
just as he stretched out his arms for us on the cross.

He wants us to bear the burdens of others,

just as he bore the weight of the cross on his back on his way to Golgotha.

He wants us to look with love on those who have sinned against us and say,
“Father, forgive them.”

Our bonds with one another are made secure through the cross

because it is only through the cross
that the barriers of anger and hatred and resentment between people
can be removed.

What replaces them is love and compassion and forgiveness.

These are what should be revealed on our faces
every time we look at a spouse, a friend, a loved one,
a neighbor, a classmate, a co-worker.

We look on them with love, because Christ looked on us with love on the cross.

[What does this mean?]

Did you ever have the experience of
seeing someone in the grocery store or on the street
when they still had a cross of ashes on their forehead?

We should remember that, spiritually speaking,
we always have the cross of Christ on our foreheads
and everything that we express with our faces
should be an expression of Christ in our lives.

What does this mean? The great Lutheran question...
It means greeting others joyfully.
It means giving people a second chance when they sin against us.
It means giving an encouraging look to someone who is struggling.
It means being kind to everyone we meet.
It means being a calming and comforting presence to those around you.

[Conclusion]

Now is the time to celebrate one another
and celebrate that God has put us together
in this place and in this time
to accomplish something in harmony with one another.

In other words, as St. Paul tells us:

“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

Amen.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, ...
to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations,
for ever and ever! AMEN!