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3.26.17  
Ephesians 5

### Walk Lightly

As a flatlander, I don't dare say "Jeezum Crow". Don't have the credentials.  
But I've been through a few stick seasons and mud seasons.  
And I've been to a few Open Barns at Tom and Lisa's farm.

I've learned a few things in seven years.  
I've been well schooled in Green Up Day zeal.  
And I've picked up on the fact that there is no discernible "T" in Vermont.  
And there are three Es in cremees (which are wicked decent).

I know now to actually stop at intersections  
and to wave my thanks in crosswalks.

Because the chance of my knowing that driver is pretty good.  
And the chance of my seeing him  
at the Bagel Bakery within the hour is even better.

With help from friends, I have come to understand that it's okay  
to have a three-pound block of Cabot Extra Sharp in the 'fridge.

And, of course, it's unnecessary to ask for *real* maple syrup.  
Because maple syrup *is* real.

And I have observed that wherever Trent Campbell shows up  
with camera in hand  
is the most happening place in Addison County.

So, I've learned a couple-two-three things about the culture of this shire town.  
And — like some of you — I'm still working on it.

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Culture can be defined in many ways.

The word itself comes into circulation about 50 years before the birth of Christ.  
Cicero — the great Roman orator and philosopher —  
writes about the "cultivation of the soul" ... or ... *cultura animi*.

What he has in mind is ideal human development,  
which comes from tilling the soil of virtuous ideas

and getting to know the best of everything ever thought, written, and said.

I like that idea.

But the kind of culture I have in mind is something lived out and local.  
It is the way of life of a particular group of people  
in a particular place, at a particular time.

This includes what we say and how we say it.  
It includes all the unspoken agreements between neighbors.  
It includes customs and rituals.  
It includes Scott Ireland's cement mixer all dressed up in Christmas lights.  
It includes the Chili Festival and the Festival on the Green.  
It includes all that makes living here particular to living HERE.

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And really — we could say the same about church.

The culture of a church — like that of a town — will change in time.  
But I spy particular markings of our congregation in our day.

To be sure — the culture of this church is not what I say it is.  
It's what we give our hearts to.  
It's what we do.  
What we say.  
What we strive to be.

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By unanimous vote at last year's Annual Meeting, we said YES  
to an eloquent revision of Our Covenant.

Our Covenant reflects back to me a church I recognize,  
a congregation I know and love.

Several words and phrases jump off that page:

Welcome. Respect. Difference. Unity. Caring. Allegiance to Jesus.

And there are a few lines that look to me like a stake in the ground.  
It's the final sentence of the Covenant.

It reads:

This is who we are: a church united in its diversity, with a faith centered on Jesus, committed to living out the Christian vision captured in the words of the prophet Micah: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?"

If someone were to ask me at today's New Member Orientation —  
“What kind of church is this church?” —  
I would gladly share those very words.

In fact — I'll bring copies of Our Covenant for each one to bring home.  
Because what it says matters.  
And because our best attempts to walk that talk matter even more.

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So, I've been walking around this past week  
with Our Covenant in one hand.  
and with the Letter to the Ephesians in the other.

There are more than a few similarities.  
Most notably — neither was likely written by St. Paul.  
But both seem awfully inspired by him.

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Whoever wrote this circular letter to the house churches in Ephesus ...  
was writing to diverse communities —  
to small congregations made up of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.

And let's pause long enough to remember that these congregations were young.  
Church was something new then.  
Church was a small group of Christians gathering in someone's home,  
sitting around someone's kitchen table,  
trying to figure out how to be church.

Even the word “Christian” was not old enough to vote  
when Paul's ghost writer signed and sealed this letter.

And that's important to keep in mind,  
because it helps explain why the author keeps saying:  
“THIS IS WHO WE ARE.”

Well, actually ... he never says that.  
But it really is the unwritten refrain of this entire letter.

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It's how Chapter 5 begins.

This is who we are.

We are children of God.  
We are imitators of God in this way.

By the grace given to us, we seek to love as Jesus loved us.  
By the grace given to us we are all about the work of building communities  
whose identifying marks include:  
Compassionate care for one another.  
And service of those whose needs are deep

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This is who we are.  
We are children of light.  
And as children of light we are committed to goodness and justice and truth.

We sail by the winds of God's generosity ...  
and by the ballast of our integrity and faithfulness.  
And we leave in our wake the Siren song of callousness and corruption.

This is who we are.

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And when we get it right, we hear Marvin Gaye in the background,  
and we (too) want to know — What's going on?  
We ask "Why?"

Why the lack of morality in a proposed federal budget  
balanced on the backs of the poorest among us?

Why line the richest pockets at the cost of affordable housing,  
and job training, and support for homeless and hungry neighbors?

Why all the fear that fuels hate?  
And all the hate ... that undermines unity in diversity?

We ask "Why?" not because we can't put up with a leader's foibles.  
But because these are not foibles.  
They are a mockery of what is good and just and true.

And because we have COVENANTED with one another  
to be a United Church of Christ.

And we have agreed that ...  
"his enduring presence lives on in our regard for one another

and in our outreach to those beyond our congregation.”

This is who we are.

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So, does the author of the Letter to the Ephesians think ...  
that those churches will actually get it right?

Will the baby-bird Christians really fly to those heights?  
Will they be able to embody WHO THEY ARE?

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Well, based on the number of times “forgiveness” comes up in this letter,  
that is not a sure thing.

But here’s the MAIN THING.

There is in this letter and in our Covenant an unmistakable longing.

A deep longing to be who we are —  
Children of God. Imitators of Christ. Bearers of light.

A deep longing to be a community that grows community in the rich soil of Welcome. Respect.  
Difference. Unity. Caring. And allegiance to Jesus.

And from what I’ve learned about Christian culture,  
this desire to get it right ... is where Church began.

And it’s where this church begins — again and again and again.  
Amen.