

When I was in high school I had one year of Accelerated English with Mrs. Moore. Mrs. Moore was this large woman with a very imposing presence. She always spoke bluntly and was very honest in her comments as she responded not only to our written work but also our overabundance of questions during class discussions. I have to admit I was slightly intimidated by Mrs. Moore. However, my growing appreciation for the great literary works of the past came alive as we learned about Chaucer by reading and memorizing some of *Canterbury Tales*, by studying the plays of Shakespeare, and reading Dante's epic poem, *The Divine Comedy*. My love for the English language also grew as we wrote papers about these works and composed our own original stories. When Mrs. More returned our graded papers, I always relished reading through her comments. It seemed as though she provided volumes of notes designed to push us into a new level of writing and communicating. I learned more about grammar from Mrs. Moore than I did from any other teacher or professor after those high school years. And, one thing I remember her explaining very thoroughly was the difference between the indicative and the imperative.

The indicative expresses or indicates an objective fact or reality and it is declarative, denoting a simple assertion or certainty. In contrast, the

imperative expresses a command or an order. The imperative calls for action. I remember Mrs. Moore's teaching on this because I think of it often as I read scripture. When looking at the words of Scripture, the indicative refers to what God has already done for us. It is the God side of the equation as we live in relationship to God. And, from a theological standpoint, the imperative calls and exhorts us to live in a certain way, it is the believer's side of the equation. The imperative usually flows from and depends upon the indicative. We can say the indicative in scripture tells us we have been declared righteous in God's sight because of the finished work of Christ. The imperative flows forth from the indicative as we are exhorted to respond to God's grace by dying to self and becoming more like Christ. And, the indicative and imperative are present in all three lessons today.

In our first lesson we find the prophet, Elijah, in despair because Queen Jezebel wants him killed. Elijah has just won a contest with the false prophets of Baal and, consequently, many of the false prophets died. Elijah runs away exhausted, depressed and crippled by fear. He lies down under a broom tree wanting to die and, in his despair, falls asleep. An angel then wakes him and says, "Get up and eat." Elijah eats and falls back asleep. Then, the angel again wakes him and says, "Get up and eat."

So, Elijah gets up, eats and then has the strength to travel for forty days and nights to Mt. Sinai. While the imperative, “Get up and eat,” seems to be primary in this story, it really needs to be understood in light of the indicative. Elijah was able to get up and eat **because** God had provided food in the first place. God is a generous, gracious God who provides so therefore, Elijah, “get up and eat.”

In God, there is an abundance of grace and immeasurable love, more than enough to go around. Therefore, let go of your fear, your anxiety and your despair. Trust in the God who provides. Take a risk, go beyond your comfort zone and get involved in the work God is doing in this place. Get up and eat!

In today’s second lesson, we discover the writer of Ephesians is a master at using the indicative and the imperative. The author of this letter describes what Christian community looks like in **light** of who **God** is and what **God** has done through Christ. While there appear to be a bunch of rules or imperatives telling the Ephesians how to live, we must be aware of the indicative that precedes today’s reading. In the first three chapters of this book, the author lays out the indicative by proclaiming that the church **is** one. The author tells us that the walls dividing Jews and Gentiles have been broken down. This is something that has already happened through

Christ, it is fact. So, therefore, the imperative – we are to live speaking truth to our neighbors and putting away falsehood. We **are** one in Christ Jesus, we **are** members of one another, so speak the truth in love. Don't be disgruntled and let issues grow and fester below the surface. Speak kindly to each other and speak the truth in love.

We are one in Christ, we are members of one another. Therefore . . . “Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil.” Now I have to say, there's nothing wrong with anger. There's no reason to think that good Christian people are always “nice.” Anger is normal in the context of community. But **do not** let it grow, take root and create a permanent wedge between you and others.

We are one in Christ, we are members of one another. Therefore, “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.” If our unity is an accomplished fact, then how we speak to one another matters. The truth of the matter is, our words have the ability to give **grace** to those who hear, **and** our words have the ability to tear people apart. But the writer of Ephesians is saying, “Put away from you all bitterness and wrath, anger, wrangling, and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another.”

It's time to break the cycle and forgive because of the indicative, "God in Christ has forgiven you." Forgive because you have been forgiven.

And, finally, in our gospel for today, the indicative is spoken by Jesus himself as he declares, "I am the bread of life. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I give for the life of the world is my flesh." So, therefore, we are exhorted and called to come, "Come and be touched by God's presence. Come with hearts and minds, with hands and mouths and bodies, to receive the incarnate God, the God who took and still takes physical form for us. Come, be fed, and then be sent out for service in God's world." (David Lose) That is the imperative.

Oh, yes, I am so grateful for what Mrs. Moore taught me so many years ago. She never realized it, but she helped me more fully discover the presence of the indicative and imperative in scripture and in Christian life. God in Christ has made us God's very own, and now we are called to respond by living out God's grace and love in a hurting, broken world. How can we do anything else?