

Weekend of Sunday, June 19, 2022
2nd Sunday after Pentecost/Year C
First Reading: Isaiah 65:1-9
Second Reading: Galatians 1:1-24
Gospel Reading: Luke 8:26-39
Sermon Title: “One in Christ”

Theme

Today we begin a journey with Paul and the Christian fellowship in Galatia. For this and the next five weeks, we will make our way through Paul's Letter to the Ephesians and find out if any of it applies to us in our day.

Texts

First Reading: Isaiah 65:1-9

¹I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask,
to be found by those who did not seek me.
I said, “Here I am, here I am,”
to a nation that did not call on my name.
²I held out my hands all day long
to a rebellious people,
who walk in a way that is not good,
following their own devices;
³a people who provoke me
to my face continually,
sacrificing in gardens
and offering incense on bricks;
⁴who sit inside tombs,
and spend the night in secret places;
who eat swine’s flesh,
with broth of abominable things in their vessels;
⁵who say, “Keep to yourself,
do not come near me, for I am too holy for you.”
These are a smoke in my nostrils,
a fire that burns all day long.
⁶See, it is written before me:
I will not keep silent, but I will repay;
I will indeed repay into their laps
⁷their iniquities and their ancestors’ iniquities together,
says the LORD;
because they offered incense on the mountains
and reviled me on the hills,
I will measure into their laps
full payment for their actions.
⁸Thus says the LORD:
As the wine is found in the cluster,
and they say, “Do not destroy it,
for there is a blessing in it,”
so I will do for my servants’ sake,
and not destroy them all.

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⁹I will bring forth descendants from Jacob,
and from Judah inheritors of my mountains;
my chosen shall inherit it,
and my servants shall settle there.

Second Reading: Galatians 1:1-24

¹Paul an apostle — sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead — ²and all the members of God's family who are with me,
To the churches of Galatia:

³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

⁶I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — ⁷not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed! ⁹As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed!

¹⁰Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

¹¹For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; ¹²for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

¹³You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. ¹⁴I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. ¹⁵But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased ¹⁶to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, ¹⁷nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.

¹⁸Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days; ¹⁹but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother. ²⁰In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie! ²¹Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, ²²and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; ²³they only heard it said, "The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy." ²⁴And they glorified God because of me.

Gospel: Luke 8:26-39

²⁶Then [Jesus and his disciples] arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. ²⁸When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me"—²⁹for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) ³⁰Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion"; for many demons had entered him. ³¹They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

³²Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. ³³Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

³⁴When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. ³⁶Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. ³⁷Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. ³⁸The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹"Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

Sermon

Preaching the Gospel is a serious thing, but it is a common practice to engage the congregation by using humor. I am aware that my sermons lately have been serious, not too serious, but serious and lacking in humor. So for better or worse, and without any sense of appropriateness to the texts, I have a joke. It's a Father's Day joke.

A story is told of a man who came to Boston from a foreign land and encountered a priest walking down the street. The man stopped the priest and asked, "Excuse me, but why are you wearing your shirt backward?" The priest smiled benevolently and said, "Because, my son, I am a Father."

The man scratched his head and replied, "I am a father too, and I don't wear my shirts backward!"

Again the priest chuckled, "But I am a Father of thousands." To which the man replied, "Well then, maybe you should wear your shorts backward!"

This morning I am starting a sermon series on Paul's letter to the Galatians that will run for the next five weeks. Along the way, we will explore

1. the author of the letter,
2. discover where in the world Galatia was,
3. the recipient of the letter, the Galatians,
4. the reason for the letter,
5. and the issue referred to in the letter and how all of this applies (or not) to us today.

The letter begins as many of Paul's authentic letters do, with a salutation. The author very clearly identified himself as the apostle Paul. But more than just a simple salutation – "Hey, this is Paul!" Paul addressed his authority right away. He wrote that his authority is other-worldly. More specifically that his authority was:

¹"neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead"

In around 35 CE, before his conversion, when Paul was Saul, the persecutor of the Christians, he secured authority to persecute the Christians from the Sanhedrin, the highest authority in Judaism. The Sanhedrin was made up of people, both clergy and lay, but to my point, Saul's authority *was* by "human commission" and "authority."

But then on that road to Damascus, Saul had a dramatic encounter with the Risen Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son who was raised from the dead and lives eternally, and Saul's identity was forever changed. His name was changed to Paul as a symbol of his changed life and mission and he became a tireless missionary for God revealed in Jesus Christ.

Now I think we can all agree that Paul's authority is powerless unless the reader is a Christian. We Christians believe that God in Christ is the supreme ruler of the universe and as such, has dominion over our lives – when we allow it, but many more people don't call Jesus Christ the Lord of their lives. They either follow another religion or no religion at all or some mixture of the two, in other words, they pick and choose their way through the doctrines of their chosen faith. I think many Christians do this too. The Galatians may have been guilty of this.

I'll tell you more about where Galatia was and who the Galatians were in the weeks to come.

Paul continued his salutation with a brief synopsis of the Gospel in verses three through five.

³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵to whom be the glory forever and ever.
Amen.

In this one complex sentence Paul said several things:

1. He felt that delivering grace and peace is his job, and furthermore, it set the stage for what is to come.
2. He reminds his readers of the sacrifice God in Christ made to set us free from our sins.

3. He reminds his readers that we are free from sin in the present evil age, meaning that our lives in Christ free us from the power of sin.
4. All this is for the Glory of God, and that is the purpose of the Christian's life – to bring God glory. I love the opening passage of the bestseller, "The Purpose Driven Life." The author wrote, "It's not about you!" and then went on to write that the purpose of every human life, but especially the Christian's life, is to honor, please, and glorify God by the way we live our lives.

Paul wrote that synopsis to remind his readers in Galatia of their purpose in life because they have not been living up to it.

Already beginning in verse six and for the next three verses we *sort of* learn Paul's reason for writing the Galatians:

⁶I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — ⁷not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed!

Apparently charlatans entered or influenced the Christian fellowship in Galatia. These charlatans were proclaiming another gospel contrary to the one that Paul taught them. Sadly, little is known about who they were or what they taught, but that really doesn't matter or Paul would have probably addressed it. What matters is that it was not the gospel of Jesus Christ that Paul taught them, and this led to confusion among the fellowship. We can imagine all sorts of heresies because we deal with them today:

- Works righteousness – that teaches that doing good works is all that counts.
- Decision theology – that teaches salvation is determined by the decision of the individual.
- Glory theology – that teaches that the better Christian we are the closer we get to God.
- Prosperity theology – that teaches that if we just have enough faith, God will rain down blessings upon us.

These theologies that we Lutherans do not follow and find to be in conflict with scripture are alive and well within our culture. We can imagine how easy it is to be suffering and seek out a miracle healer when they come to town, or send a contribution to a television evangelist and get a bottle of anointing oil that promises a cure.

Again, we don't know the specific issue that Paul wrote about, but he was angry, not at the charlatans so much as he was angry with the Christians of the Galatian fellowship. We can hear it in his writing:

⁶I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — ⁷not that there is another gospel.

Now, Christians of the first century did not have the benefit of scripture. All they had was the word of this traveling itinerant preacher, Paul. It is not the same for us. We have two-thousand years of Christian history, Bible, and theology developed by people like Martin Luther, who have spent lifetimes studying this stuff. We have the benefit of all this, so we have less of an excuse than the Galatian Christians did.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

The issues raised by Paul to the Galatians might not seem important or appropriate to us today, but I would argue that they are particularly timeless, perhaps especially in our American culture right now.

Right now, in our society, we are struggling with the legitimacy of:

- the 2nd Amendment, in whole or in part, the right of every American to keep and bear arms in a society where gun violence is a daily occurrence, often wounding or killing innocent people;
- and the 14th Amendment which is the basis that the Supreme Court used to decide the infamous abortion case, Roe vs. Wade.

I don't want to discuss either side of either issue. I just want you to realize that in the United States of America, we have determined that "we the people" are the supreme and final word – unless and until we disagree.

In his letter to the Galatians, the apostle Paul, in lengthy measure, deferred to a higher authority, the supreme authority, that all Christians are to defer to, and that is God revealed in Jesus Christ. In writing to the Galatians, he accused some of proclaiming a Gospel contrary to his, and he clarified that his gospel came from the Risen Lord Jesus Christ himself. In Paul's defense of himself and his teachings, he said there is no higher authority than that.

How does this apply to us? I am so glad you asked. Honestly, I don't care what your opinion is on either of the two issues I raised, unless you have done your homework by looking into scripture and seeing what it says, or what can be applied to the issue, and have prayed and meditated about them.

Oh I know, guns didn't exist in the first century, but killing has been around since Cain and Abel. And I looked up the history of abortion and the first record of one is dated 1550 BCE! These are controversial issues in our society, but the Christian needs to know what the Bible says about such things. We should not let ourselves be confused by the rhetoric from either side. The God we worship is not a God of confusion, but a God of order. The Christian needs to know what God has to say.

In the *First Reading from Isaiah*, the LORD was angry because God's chosen people, Israel, turned away and worshiped other pagan gods. God punished them by letting them go their own way to their own peril. "But pastor we don't have pagan gods." Don't kid yourself. Threaten to take something away, or change the way we've always done it and watch how energized people can be. The Christian answers to one and only one, and that is God revealed in Jesus Christ.

And in the *Gospel Reading*, Jesus went to a foreign land and had mercy on one of its citizens. Jesus asked the man what his name was. He did that because names have power. In the First Reading, the subjects are God's "Chosen People" and in the Second Reading, the author identified himself as Paul and gave his resume so that his readers could trust him. The subject in the Gospel Reading was a man who said his name was Legion. I assure you that was not the name his momma gave him. That was the name his community gave him or his many demons gave him – Legion is a Roman military term meaning anywhere from three to six thousand soldiers. Jesus set the man free of his legions of demons and what did he get for that? The pagan community could not see the good that Jesus had done, but was "afraid," "seized with great fear" wrote Luke, about Jesus messing with their

community. *He may have been possessed and a bother, but he was our bother, Jesus. Please leave!*

Yes, I think Paul's letter is timeless. Paul reminds his readers that we were given the name Christian when we were baptized or came to faith. That name carries Gospel in that we are free from the power of sin. But it also carries Law in that we who take on the name Christian submit to the supreme ruler of the universe and as such, he, Jesus Christ, has dominion over our lives.

A story is told of the young child of a pastor who observed his father bow his head in deep reverence before he got up in the pulpit to preach. The little boy asked, "Why do you do that?" The father explained, "I'm asking the LORD to give me a good sermon." The little boy asked, "Then why doesn't he?"

I hope you come back week after week, or watch online, and hear about the entire letter, and consider how it applies in our day.

Prayer

Merciful God, you break the chains of sin that bind us through the sacrifice of your son. And then, we often chain ourselves to our own ideologies. Remind us that is it the truth that sets us free, and the truth comes through the Gospel of Jesus Christ of Holy Scripture. Inspire us to read it and meditate on it, and let it give us purpose and guidance for living. Amen