

Weekend of Sunday, July 3, 2022
4th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 14/Year C
First Reading: Isaiah 66:10-14
Second Reading: Galatians 3:1-29
Gospel Reading: Luke 10:1-11, 16-20
Sermon Title: "Law Versus Faith"

Theme

God is the source of our nourishment. Jesus' invitation to "take and eat . . . take and drink" is a repeated one. In holy communion, in the word read and proclaimed, in the assembly of the people of God, the dominion of God has come near. Rejoice! Your name is written in heaven.

Text

First Reading: Isaiah 66:10-14

¹⁰Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her,
all you who love her;
rejoice with her in joy,
all you who mourn over her—

¹¹that you may nurse and be satisfied
from her consoling breast;
that you may drink deeply with delight
from her glorious bosom.

¹²For thus says the LORD:
I will extend prosperity to her like a river,
and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream;
and you shall nurse and be carried on her arm,
and dandled on her knees.

¹³As a mother comforts her child,
so I will comfort you;
you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

¹⁴You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice;
your bodies shall flourish like the grass;
and it shall be known that the hand of the LORD is with his servants,
and his indignation is against his enemies.

Second Reading: Galatians 3:1-29

¹You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified! ²The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? ³Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? ⁴Did you experience so much for nothing? — if it really was for nothing. ⁵Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? ⁶Just as Abraham "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," ⁷so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. ⁸And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel

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beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you." ⁹For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed.

¹⁰For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law." (Deut 27:26) ¹¹Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for "The one who is righteous will live by faith." (Hab 2:4) ¹²But the law does not rest on faith; on the contrary, "Whoever does the works of the law will live by them." (Lev 18:5) ¹³Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us — for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" (Deut 21:23) — ¹⁴in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

¹⁵Brothers and sisters, I give an example from daily life: once a person's will has been ratified, no one adds to it or annuls it. ¹⁶Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring it does not say, "And to offsprings," as of many; but it says, "And to your offspring," that is, to one person, who is Christ. ¹⁷My point is this: the law, which came four hundred thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. ¹⁸For if the inheritance comes from the law, it no longer comes from the promise; but God granted it to Abraham through the promise. ¹⁹Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained through angels by a mediator. ²⁰Now a mediator involves more than one party; but God is one.

²¹Is the law then opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law. ²²But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

²³Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. ²⁴Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, ²⁶for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. ²⁷As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

Gospel: Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

¹After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ²He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. ⁵Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' ⁶And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. ⁷Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. ⁸Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; ⁹cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' ¹⁰But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.' "

¹⁶"Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

¹⁷The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" ¹⁸He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. ¹⁹See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. ²⁰Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Sermon

Last week I established that the issue that caused Paul to write his castigating letter to the Galatians was that the Galatian fellowship had been infiltrated by charlatans who were preaching another Gospel. That other gospel was that Christians needed to be fully Jewish before and after they became Christian. And becoming fully Jewish included certain works of the Law, and more specifically included circumcision.

In this week's Second Reading from Galatians 3, Paul seems to be over this one law, circumcision (did you notice he never mentioned it once?) and more broadly referred to the Law. By the way, I was not aware of this, but there is now a machine that does automated circumcision? Yea, I hear it is cutting edge.

There are 613 commandments, laws, ordinances, and statutes that make up what is known as the Law in the Old Testament. Just to be clear, when I refer to The Law, I am talking about the Law of the Old Testament. It was a primitive time, and unlike our modern method of making and keeping laws, they are spread out over several books but are mainly in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament.

Allow me to give you a brief history lesson on "The Law." Before the Exodus, God's people, if you allow me to use that term, were limited to tribes; tribes *without laws*. Remember there was Abraham and his son, Jacob, whose name got changed to Israel. It was about this time that Abraham and his decedents became known as the Hebrews.

Israel had twelve sons, who became the patriarchs of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, who became known as the Israelites, a nation of twelve tribes *without laws*. It's a long story, but Israel and his twelve sons and their descendants ended up in Egypt where they prospered for hundreds of years but then became enslaved by the Egyptians.

Moses was born an Israelite but was pulled out of the Nile River by one of Pharaoh's daughters and was raised as a prince of Egypt. Moses killed an Egyptian guard who was abusing the Israelites and went into a self-imposed exile.

Years later, Moses was called by God to set his people, the Israelites, free from slavery to Egypt. And after accomplishing that, God called Moses up to the top of Mt. Sinai where he was given the Law, more specifically, the Ten Commandments, the first of the 613 commandments, laws, ordinances, and statutes that would develop over the 40 years of wandering.

The reason for the Law was and is to give people limits. If we didn't have laws society would be like the wild west – and do you know where that expression came from? From the western United States before there was law and order. If there were no laws, society would be *anything goes*.

There were times in the Old Testament when there were no laws and that is why I mentioned the Abrahamic tribes and the Twelve Tribes of Israel. God was forming the Israelites into God's Chosen People, a people that he could raise up to be a light to the other nations, which by the way, is the definition of Gentiles. The Jews seem to have never understood this, even though it is written in scripture (Genesis 12:3). Until the Ten Commandments, the ruler of the land judged, and he didn't have to be right or fair, he was the ruler! 'It shall not be so among you' said the LORD, and the LORD gave them the Law to bring order to the lives of the people *so that* they will prosper, and other nations will be drawn to them, and therefore, to God.

The only way to be aware of and understand every one of the 613 commandments, laws, ordinances, and statutes was to study them. One of my favorite movies is "Yentle." The movie takes place in an early 20th-century Jewish village in Poland. Yentle, who was played by Barbara Streisand, is the daughter of a Polish Rabbi. The rabbi taught the Talmud, the commentary on the Law, to the boys during the day. And though it was forbidden for girls to study the Law, every evening the Rabbi pulled the curtains and taught his daughter, Yentle. In the movie, there are several scenes at the school where the Rabbi teaches the Law by debating every detail of the Law, and it is quite amusing.

The reason I mention it is because that has always been the Jewish problem. They loved and worshiped the Law more than the LORD, the giver of the Law.

Back to Paul and his letter to the Galatians, chapter 3, did the Law save the Jews, or anyone? No! Did the Law make anyone righteous before God? No! It is impossible to observe every one of the 613 commandments, laws, ordinances, and

statutes, and that misses the point of a life devoted to God anyway! And that was Paul's point! In verse 11 he quoted Deuteronomy when he wrote,

Deuteronomy 27:26 "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law."

Circumcision was just the foremost issue with the Galatians, but it was representative of the bigger problem of our sinfulness and inability to make ourselves righteous before God, thereby earning our golden ticket to heaven.

"Well then, Pastor, what should we do?" I am so glad you asked. Paul has an answer to the human problem of sin.

In verse 6 ff, Paul used Abraham as an example. Now remembering that there was no Law yet in Abraham's lifetime, Paul wrote,

⁶Abraham "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,"

Just to be clear about this passage, Paul wrote that Abraham was righteous before God by faith without the Law!

And then Paul went on to explain that it is not Abraham's DNA that makes one a descendent of Abraham, but belief in God.

⁹For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed.

And he takes us back to the Old Testament book of Habakkuk, written around 600 BCE, to confirm that this was always God's plan:

Habakkuk 2:4 "The one who is righteous will live by faith."

Faith is such an important issue for Paul in this chapter that he used it ten times in 29 verses. And for this reason, my brothers and sisters in Christ, not siblings by DNA but by faith, we can take confidence in Paul's beautiful expression:

²⁶in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. ²⁷As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male

and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

The First Reading from the Old Testament might be considered Bible porn by some. We just can't say "glorious bosom" today and get away with it. But what that passage prophecies about is a day, someday in the future, when God and all God's people are reconciled. But as we've discussed, we cannot reconcile ourselves to God. Reconciliation with God requires righteousness, and we cannot achieve that on our own. But according to this passage God will find a way – and that way is ... Jesus!

Don't let anyone, especially your own psyche, tell you that you aren't good enough; that you will never amount to anything; that you need to try harder and earn your own way. Sometimes, only sometimes, that works in this temporal realm. It never works in God's eternal realm.

In the Gospel Reading, Jesus sent seventy of his disciples out on a mission trip with the message that 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' What that means is that through Christ, we can live today under the reign of God, however incompletely. When we seek God's guidance for our lives, when we work for his purposes and glory, when we bow before him in worship and offer our daily work to him as worship, we are experiencing the kingdom of God.

This is what Martin Luther meant when he encouraged people to "sin boldly." He encouraged people to not be trapped by the Law that kept people from enjoying life to the fullest, knowing that come what may, our salvation has been won. God *is* reigning over us and making his kingdom present on earth through us. And we do this without regard for the Law, because we are free in Christ.

The truth is that while our many good works and effort honor and please God, they, in and of themselves, are worthless without one thing – and that one thing is faith. All the righteousness we need has been won for us on the cross by Jesus Christ our Lord. It is only through faith in him that we are made righteous. So let us not be "foolish" like the Galatians, who were "bewitched" by their own ignorance. Know the truth that will set you free.

Prayer

Abundant life-giving God, we thank you for the sacrifice of your Son and our Lord Jesus that has set us free from the burden of the Law. Now we pray that you send us your Holy Spirit to encourage us to more fully live that abundant life you give, loving and serving you until your kingdom is complete. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen