

The Rev. Duane A. Jesse, Senior Pastor
Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, July 10, 2022
5th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 15/Year C

First Reading: Deuteronomy 30:9-14

Second Reading: Galatians 4:1-31

Gospel Reading: Luke 10:25-37

Sermon Title: “Formerly a Slave, Now Child & Heir”

Theme

To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind is to reflect God’s mercy in responding to one’s neighbor. That mercy found its most profound expression in the “gospel that has come to you”—namely the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That gospel mercy comes to us again today: at the font, at the table, and from the pulpit. It is very near to you.

Texts

First Reading: Deuteronomy 30:9-14

⁹The LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all your undertakings, in the fruit of your body, in the fruit of your livestock, and in the fruit of your soil. For the LORD will again take delight in prospering you, just as he delighted in prospering your ancestors, ¹⁰when you obey the LORD your God by observing his commandments and decrees that are written in this book of the law, because you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

¹¹Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. ¹²It is not in heaven, that you should say, “Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” ¹³Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” ¹⁴No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.

Second Reading: Galatians 1:1-31

¹My point is this: heirs, as long as they are minors, are no better than slaves, though they are the owners of all the property; ²but they remain under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father. ³So with us; while we were minors, we were enslaved to the elemental spirits of the world. ⁴But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. ⁶And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” ⁷So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

⁸Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods. ⁹Now, however, that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits? How can you want to be enslaved to them again? ¹⁰You are observing special days, and months, and seasons, and years. ¹¹I am afraid that my work for you may have been wasted.

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¹²Friends, I beg you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong. ¹³You know that it was because of a physical infirmity that I first announced the gospel to you; ¹⁴though my condition put you to the test, you did not scorn or despise me, but welcomed me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.

¹⁵What has become of the goodwill you felt? For I testify that, had it been possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. ¹⁶Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth? ¹⁷They make much of you, but for no good purpose; they want to exclude you, so that you may make much of them. ¹⁸It is good to be made much of for a good purpose at all times, and not only when I am present with you. ¹⁹My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, ²⁰I wish I were present with you now and could change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

²¹Tell me, you who desire to be subject to the law, will you not listen to the law? ²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and the other by a free woman. ²³One, the child of the slave, was born according to the flesh; the other, the child of the free woman, was born through the promise. ²⁴Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One woman, in fact, is Hagar, from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery. ²⁵Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. ²⁶But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother. ²⁷For it is written,

"Rejoice, you childless one, you who bear no children,
burst into song and shout, you who endure no birth pangs;
for the children of the desolate woman are more numerous
than the children of the one who is married."

²⁸Now you, my friends, are children of the promise, like Isaac. ²⁹But just as at that time the child who was born according to the flesh persecuted the child who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. ³⁰But what does the scripture say? "Drive out the slave and her child; for the child of the slave will not share the inheritance with the child of the free woman." ³¹So then, friends, we are children, not of the slave but of the free woman.

Gospel: Luke 10:25-37

²⁵Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" ²⁷He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." ²⁸And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

²⁹But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³²So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.

³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'

³⁶Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" ³⁷He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Sermon

In today's sermon, I will be continuing in our six-week series on Galatians, today focusing on Galatians chapter 4, but I would like to begin with the First Reading from Deuteronomy.

Allow me to remind you that at that time in history, God was trying to shape a motley conglomeration of people, freshly freed from slavery in Egypt, into one faithful people that will become known as God's "Chosen People." Chosen to be a light to the Gentiles. But having been the slaves of a ruling overlord who didn't have to be just or kind, they were completely undisciplined.

Last week I gave you a brief history of the Old Testament Law in which I reminded you that one of the first things God did for his Chosen People was to call Moses, their leader, up to the top of Mt. Sinai and give them the Ten Commandments, the first of the 613 commandments and decrees that would collectively become known as the "book of the law" or more simply, "the law."

The voice in this passage from Deuteronomy is Moses, who led the Israelites out of Egypt and who has been their leader for the subsequent forty years of wandering, who wrote most of the 603 other commandments and decrees, and who had been their conduit to God. The context of the passage is Moses and his successor, Joshua, addressing the Israelites and asking them to affirm the covenant God made with them, that we know as the Mosaic Covenant. In summary, Moses said that if the people honor and obey the covenant, God will bless them and things will go better for them.

I would like to add here that this is conventional wisdom for anyone, not just godly people. If we live using common sense and obey the laws of the land, things will *likely* go well for us. I said, *likely* – terrible things can happen to godly people that they don't deserve, but then none of us deserves eternal life either.

Onto Galatians. Galatia was a region in north-central Anatolia, modern-day Turkey, and therefore not that far, relatively speaking, from Israel, the home of Judaism. Scholars are unclear whether the Galatian Christian fellowship that Paul Christianized and wrote to were previously Jews who were converted to Christians, or whether they were converts to Christianity from some other pagan religion.

Either way, the Galatian Christian fellowship had been infiltrated by the charlatans I have previously mentioned who taught that to be Christian meant they had to first and simultaneously be Jewish. As we have read and heard, Paul was furious that they allowed themselves to be led astray from the Gospel he had taught them.

I've always thought that Paul was verbose. And as an example of my thinking, we have chapter 4, a long 31 verses, which I will summarize for you now.

Paul started this chapter using the metaphor of an heir to an estate. Something has to happen to the owner of the estate for the heir to collect on the estate.

- the death of the estate owner,
- or in the case of a minor, there might be a minimum age the heir has to reach,
- or in the case of someone not able to manage their own affairs, a guardian might be appointed.

All this makes sense to us, and in some cases, these very stipulations are put in place in our day.

What I think Paul is saying here is that there are natural forces at work in the world, that he called "elemental spirits of the world," that pagan people had to deal with. If the Galatian Christians were previously pagan, he might have been referring to astrology, or perhaps observances of celestial happenings that pagan people believed were caused by their pagan gods. There were festivals celebrated and offerings and sacrifices made so that, for example, the pagan gods would be encouraged to provide enough rain to have a bountiful crop, but not too much that the crop would be drowned out. It made sense to them in their primitive understanding of their pagan gods.

Or, since scholars aren't sure if the Galatian Christians were previously Jewish, maybe the charlatans had convinced the Galatian Christians that Old Testament law-keeping and the Jewish sacrificial system were the way to go – even as Christians. And in a way, weren't the Jews placating their angry God with their sacrifices and offerings? And an incorrect reading of the First Reading from Deuteronomy confirms this. It can be read as a conditional statement. *If you obey the commandments and decrees of the LORD, then the LORD will bless you.*

This even makes sense in our day, because we, like the Galatian Christians, see this lived out in our natural world. If we obey the laws, we will not get arrested. If we don't smoke, we won't get lung cancer. If we exercise and eat well, we are less likely to get obese, and so on.

BUT, beginning in verse 4 and following, upset Paul upset the Galatian Christian's stinking thinking when he wrote,

⁴But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, ... so that we might receive adoption as children. ⁶And because you are children, ... you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

If you aren't following, Paul wrote that in God's good time, God, God's self, upset the natural order of creation, by intervening by sending his Son, Jesus Christ, to give all people a reboot, so to speak. Formerly pagan people are no longer slaves to pagan gods they have to encourage them to get what they need. Or, formerly Jewish people are no longer slaves to the law that requires them to appease their angry God.

God's Son and our Lord Jesus Christ gave all people the opportunity to be made righteous through faith in him. That's it! The work is done! 'Quit making it so hard,' we can hear Paul say.

Paul wrote that we should address God as "Abba, Father" because we are not subjects of a ruler, but have been adopted as God's children, and if children then heirs, no longer forced to deal with the stipulations I mentioned earlier! Can you imagine having an heir's share of the Kingdom of God? Well, it's yours! Mind blown!

In verse 12 Paul resorted to begging them to listen to him.

¹²Friends, I beg you, become as I am

¹⁹My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you

In verse 19 he wrote that he feels like he is in childbirth again over their drifting back into their pre-Christian ways. He cannot understand how anyone would want

to slide back into their old law-driven religion when through Christ they have freedom and grace.

We might look at them and say, “Those stupid Galatians!” but it will only take a little soul searching to see that we are disposed to the same behavior. We go to church and participate regularly, and then something upsets our world, something big or small, and we resort to our own efforts shutting God in Christ out of performing a miracle or seeing us through it. Or the upset doesn't turn out like we think it ought to and we turn our backs on God because God didn't fix the upset to our expectations. Brothers and sisters in Christ, the faithful response is to always trust God with the results. Because come what may, we were formerly slaves, but now we are God's children and heirs of God's kingdom.

We learn how to live into God's kingdom in the Gospel Reading. In the Gospel Reading, a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. He asked the Lord what he had to do to inherit eternal life – a very important question, wouldn't you agree. As Jesus sometimes did, he redirected the question back to the lawyer, because Jesus knew he wasn't sincere with his question and knew the lawyer already knew the right answer.

The lawyer answered,

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”²⁸ And [Jesus] said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

Did Jesus just respond to the lawyer's question about inheriting eternal life with a conditional statement? Do this and you will get that?

Furthermore, in the First Reading from Deuteronomy, did Moses explain their success to the Israelites with a conditional statement? Do this and you will get that?

Isn't all this in conflict with what Paul wrote to the Galatians? I'm so glad you asked!

No! Neither Jesus's nor Moses's responses conflicts with Paul's teaching. Jesus said, if you love God and love other people you will inherit eternal life. However,

loving God and other people and eternal life are not the same things. Eternal life is the unmerited gift for the believer. It cannot be earned by our good works, law-keeping, faithful living, or any other criteria. And loving God and loving others is the effort we give as a result of being loved by God in Christ first and in thanksgiving for the opportunity to have eternal life.

Paul begged the Galatian Christians to focus on these disciplines of their Christian faith and not fall back into thinking that they have to do something to get something. It may be that way in the world, but it is not that way in the Kingdom of God.

To put it another way, it is like a loving relationship. When one is in love with another, the two want to:

- be with each other,
- please each other,
- and are devoted to each other,

and the result is bliss – right Carol?

We all come to believe in God in Christ differently, but once we know Christ (ie., come to faith in him), we should *want to*:

- be with God in Christ through spiritual disciplines including prayer and worship,
- please God in Christ by trying to imitate his life,
- and be devoted to God in Christ by living to his example to the best of our ability.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

When we focus on, our ultimate *result* will be eternal life, not because we did such a great job *achieving* them, but because it was our faithful response to belief in God in Christ for his love, grace, and mercy in making eternal life a possibility in the first place.

Prayer

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Merciful God, theology can be a challenge and we can get things mixed up. Send your Holy Spirit to remind us that our most important task is to love you and love others by living according to the example of your Son. We pray this in his name.
Amen