

October 1 2017

## **Reading from the Bible Galatians 3:26-29**

### **Sermon**

On World Communion Sunday, this is what we understand from this scripture in the book of Galatians in the New Testament. There should be no divisions in our faith, and there should be no prejudices in our faith.

The Galatians Church was located in what was called Asia Minor. I don't think it is called that now in geography. It was a Roman colony. It was very Greek in its religion and philosophy about how people dealt with one another. St. Paul and Barnabas ministered to the large Jewish community. It was the only congregation where he said to them, "You foolish Galatians, what in the world were you thinking." What they were thinking and believing was that somehow, if you were a Gentile-(non-Jew) that you had to become a Jewish believer to fully receive the blessings of Abraham in the covenant. There were a couple of problems with that: one was you couldn't be a woman because of circumcision. Another problem was Jews didn't really believe that gentiles could be saved as part of the covenant and they danced around it. The Council of Jerusalem had to decide if the Holy Spirit was moving and gentiles were being converted. This idea was very, very painful for Jews. It was difficult for them to accept gentiles as Christians. It was at the far end of salvation that Jews could hardly consider it. In fact there was a prayer that Jews said and they prayed it often. "I thank God that I was not born a Gentile or a slave or a woman." Isn't it interesting that Paul picked up on all three of those ideas. The Jews weren't the only ones that believed that. Other people quoted Socrates and he said basically the same thing. He wasn't Jewish. He is supposed to have said, "Thank God, I wasn't born a brute-an animal. I was born a human. I am thankful that I was not born a slave or a female." It was part of that whole culture of the time.

Women couldn't testify in court. They were considered worthless. They were supposed to stay at home and have children. Today we talk about Shari Law, of the Muslims and it wasn't too far off in that belief. Women weren't included; they were not educated and they were to stay home and raise children in the Jewish culture. Some Greeks in northern Greece the people more privileged but that was the exception and not the rule.

Paul writes about Jewish relationships, he goes on to say there is no difference between gentile and Jew or slave or free. Some people have listed a third or as high of half of the people in the Roman Empire were slaves. A male or female may have been born into slavery or may have been sold or captured but once in it a person as a slave they couldn't get out of it very easy no matter even if you were young or old. And it was always whole families young or old.

So Paul's message wasn't just a sweet sermon and we could make a circle and sing by Kum ba yah. Paul's message challenged everything that the Jews believed about how they made decisions and how they dealt with people. It was starting of a new era. In Christ Jesus it is not possible that there be Jew or gentiles. Those ideas do not exist in the Christian faith. There had to be no dominance and there was to be no subjection. Jesus did not say that the slaves must be freed in that culture. Unfortunately that was what was used in our American South to justify slavery. As we are transformed in our heart, we are neither blond nor brunette neither short nor tall neither Californian nor Washington. I grew up in eastern Washington. There is no western Washington vs eastern Washington because our hearts have been transformed. We don't see those differences but what we see first and foremost is a brother or sister who also loves the Lord. We are to think about that as we come to the communion table today.

When I was growing up in Davenport, Washington, I didn't know very many people who were different. Oh maybe once in a while I heard a missionary who went to the American School in Beirut in Lebanon. It was hard for me to believe people actually went there and taught there. My world was pretty small. But there was something about World Communion which captured me. It was all these different languages, all these colors of people, all the different ways of dressing, all those different ways of doing things, and all those many different cultures. It is not possible, I believe to be fully Christian and to love Christ and not see all those differences. It is easy to pick out someone in the grocery store that is different. But what does it mean in my heart? What would it be like, if we were color blind, age blind, religion blind, and education blind? Paul was directly in line with Christ's example when he ministered to people that were never ever included in polite society. They were the maimed folks, those with leprosy, the tax collectors, the Samaritans and others. Jesus crossed those barriers. He did unconventional things. He talked to a woman, a Samaritan woman at the well. We can't cross the barriers comfortably unless we recognize what Jesus did. We have to do this on our own.

I have learned a lot about prejudices. We have to think what are our prejudices? We don't think we are better than anyone else or we are better than other denominations, or we are saved better than other denominations or are loved by God more or that we are better moral citizens than others. The deeper the relationships, the more room we have living with prejudices and having shared expectations.

I remember when I went to Whitworth I had never met a black woman in my entire life. If you don't think that wasn't an interesting introduction but when we get to know the black men and women, they are just the same as any of us. They have the same goals and struggles that we all have. You have to say to yourself, what difference I am going to let it make. Would you be very kind and listen to

someone who is different. And then would you be welcoming to them. And that is where our nation is having a lot of trouble. It all happens over and over again in every generation after generation in America. People who are different from us but when they come along side of us and help make things better.

I went to presbytery on Thursday for the Presbyterian Church and one of the things that they were considering was going to the Nez Perce Counsel and offering a sincere apology to them. In earlier years, their culture was diminished, in many ways and they were conflicted. Their land was taken and promises were not kept. There was an effort to try to make things right.

And then I went Friday to the UCC meeting... And one of things the UCC mentioned that maybe men who wear long hair and still love the Lord as deeply as we can. As hearts change perhaps our world can be a little better. In Christ Jesus we are all children of God, by believing in Christ we were all baptized into Christ, putting on Jesus Christ. There should be nether Jew nor gentile, nor slave nor free person, nor male or female because we are all one in Christ Jesus. We all belong to Christ

Our journey into this new era is not a rejection of the old but is rather an addition that will allow us to live in a new world.

Are we insulated or are we isolated? Do we kind of like it the way it is? Are we in our own little world in this church? Is it a refuge? Do we really feel comfortable here or are we going to try larger vision to follow Jesus? Are we going to be real people to other real people in the community? How much are we going to let Jesus into our concept of church? How are we going to welcome them as we tell them about Jesus? Perhaps we can learn from missionaries who work with all kinds of people. Maybe we should not just try to transform people into what we think they should be but what Jesus wants them to be.—every era, every culture has its own stratification, those who are inies and outies. Samaritans outside the fold. This is going to remind us that on Communion Sunday, people all around the world are going to come and sit at the table of the Lord. The Scripture reminds us the Lord has gathered us from the ends of the earth. He did it in his own life. He did it on the death on the cross. The early church grappled with diversity and prejudices. And some day we are going to sit at that table I am not sure we are going to hear all kinds of languages and understand all kinds of languages and meet people whose lives are vastly different from ours.

Let us pray Lord. Help us as we celebrate communion. Help us as individuals and as a church and a denomination to seek to understand the boundaries of differences and the baptism of faith in Jesus. Amen.