

Dad And Paul
Galatians 3:28
Colebrook Congregational Church
June 19, 2016 / 5th Sunday After Pentecost / Proper 7C Ordinary 12C

My father liked to tease my mother. I remember dinners as a kid, where I would be sitting across from my brother, and my parents across from each other, and then I would notice a single pea quietly fly across the table towards my mom. And then another. And then a few at a time. And sometimes mashed potatoes would fly back at my dad.

Another way he teased her was by starting to tell an off-color joke. He would never finish it, because my mom would start yelling at him, and he would be overcome with giggles.

Paul's Letter to the Galatians was written around AD 55, coming after I Corinthians and before Romans, while Paul was staying in Ephesus. His audience in Galatia was mostly Gentile pagan-converts, urbanites, and they represented the full socio-economic spectrum.

Early Christianity was not a single uniform faith, and that is reflected in the reason for this Letter. Shortly after Paul had visited the Galatian churches, a group of Jewish Christians arrived in Galatia, questioning Paul's authority, claiming to have the support of the Jerusalem Apostles, insisting on circumcision and strict adherence to the Law, and claiming that in order to be a Christian, one had to be Jewish and follow all of their rites and practices.

Paul wrote this Letter to counter their arguments, because He was given the Mission to the Gentiles by Jesus, with the full support of the Jerusalem Apostles. And he argued how Jesus acted to redeem all people; that one's identity is through faith, not adherence to the Law; and how Jesus changed everything, shattering old distinctions, and made for us a new identity.

The best known verse from this Letter, sums it all up. And it is one of my father's favorite Bible verses, also also my favorite from Paul's Letters. It is part of today's selection: "There 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."

My father modeled the kind of behavior that Paul is talking about in his famous verse. Dad was very much a people person, accepting everyone no matter if they were different from him in any way. He was a deacon, a moderator, a chair of the Prudential Committee, a choir member, an Elk, and a Scout leader. He worked for a newspaper, and then managed cases and a team at The Hartford.

He would read me this verse and tell me how it does not only apply to our interpersonal relations with other Christians, but with everyone we meet. It means that we cannot be bigots if we are going to be Christian. As Jesus teaches us, we behave with Christian love & charity not only towards those like us, but towards everyone, including strangers, and even our enemies.

He had a habit of going through things with me piece by piece, taking it apart and analyzing it. This made me look at the Lord's Prayer and many hymns in a different light. He also did the same with this verse.

“There is neither Jew or Greek.”

This means: Don't be racist.

In ancient times, according to the Greeks, you are either a Greek or a Barbarian. To the ancient Jews, you are either a Jew or a Goyim. Even a Jewish proselyte is never considered to be fully Jewish. Not much room for any other people. It is not Christian to exclude someone based on geography.

“There is no longer slave or free.”

This means: Don't be classist.

And why should how much someone makes dictate how they are treated in a church community? It is not Christian to exclude someone based on income.

“There is no longer male and female.”

This means: Don't be sexist.

Ancient woman were considered to be property of their father or their husband, having the same status as a slave or a child. Jesus did not exclude women from His ministry, and Paul's ministry would have failed without the involvement of women. It is not Christian to exclude based on gender.

“All of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

This means: Don't be a bigot, we are all in this together.

Under the Law, the foreigner, proselyte, woman, and slave, all stand having a different relationship with God, so real spiritual unity is impossible, if we are bigots, and exclude people.

Paul saw that if these traditions continue in the Church, it would wound it. To continue to be like that, would be anathema to all that Jesus teaches us. We are one in Christ, but not uniform. It is a unity in our diversity.

To succumb to bigotry and exclude people, is an act of hate. And hate is infectious and violent. Hate spreads easily if not stood up against, and leads to violence in many forms. Hate begot Charleston AME Zion Church one year ago. Hate begot the San Bernardino attack. Hate begot Pulse in Orlando.

But Hate & Exclusion & Bigotry is NOT Christian. It is not religious, of any religion, or spiritual, or compatible with God in any way. To be Christian, to follow the Way of Jesus, we must see that there is no longer Us versus Them, only All of Us. We are all human. Bigotry has no place among us. We are all one.

Please join me in the Spirit of Prayer:

Loving and merciful God, we thank You for the community in which You have placed us, for the brothers and sisters with whom we walk this pilgrim journey. Help us so that we do not fail to love as You love, and to heed the advice of Your Apostle Paul, forming in us a vision of our community in which there is no partiality. Amen.

Intercessory Prayer

[PAUSE]

Holy & Gracious God, we give you thanks for the gift of life and for all the blessings of this life, for family and friends, and for love abundant. Bless us this day with Your steadfast love as we declare our trust in You.

Be with our fathers this day. Strengthen and encourage them as they seek to care for their families. Grant them grace and courage in the midst of impossible circumstances, and bless them with hope as they look toward the future.

Happy are those whose wrongs are forgiven, whose transgressions are no longer held against them. We lay before You all that is weighing us down, so that we can be freed from its burden, and receive God's mercy and love. Continue to guide us in the way we should go, and watch over us.

Be with those who are distraught, those who cannot sleep, those who know not peace and seek it, those who are in need, and those who are unwell in mind, body, or spirit. Be with the victims of violence and their loved ones. Help us to comfort them with Your abundant Love. Bless the services of all Your people, and assure them that You are pleased with their work.

We pray that You help lead us through our own trials, the sufferings and sorrows, the challenges and struggles, and back to Your Love. Fill us with hope, sustained in Your mercy, giving us guidance through Your Word, and stamina through Your Spirit.

We especially pray for:

Loving God, heal our lives, that we may acknowledge your wonderful deeds and offer you thanks from generation to generation through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Galatians 3:23-29

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There 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. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

Psalm 43

43:1 Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people; from those who are deceitful and unjust deliver me!

43:2 For you are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you cast me off? Why must I walk about mournfully because of the oppression of the enemy?

43:3 O send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling.

43:4 Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; and I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God.

43:5 Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.