

#29 15-16

Psalm 96:1-9

1 Kings 18:20-21, 30-39

Luke 7:1-10

Galatians 1:1-12

What Happens in the Meantime

Paul 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 – and all the members of God’s family who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. I 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 – not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But 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! As 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! Am 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. For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

This scripture carries the unique quality of being the only letter that Paul wrote where it does not start off with his customary prayer of thanksgiving for them after his greeting. He seems to go right into, at verse 6, a reprimand! He would have been seen as being feisty, irritated, cranky! That is why I read it the way I did, because so many years later we have gotten used to short greetings, right to the point, and we lose a lot of the tone in our short but to the point messages to each other. But the Galatians would have heard his irritation the first time they read the letter!

He was upset because, in his mind, people were being erratic. They were taught when they began to live and study Christ, and create a place of worship for him, that God was known through Christ - which opens us up to a new creative relationship based on grace and love and service. Then, in the meantime, some of the followers began teaching and reverting to some of their behavior from their previous faith traditions. And Paul had taught that faith in Christ replaced adherence to the Torah.

So Paul wants to nip that as quick as he can and set things straight. Faith in Christ is a new thing - so don’t be tempted to go back to the old patterns. He is speaking very boldly in order to save the flock from reverting to their old patterns which stagnate, and encourage them to continue to grow in Christ, which is an ever new way of being involved with the world, not retreating from it.

We today have similar experiences. The DWF has had yard sales for ---- suffice it to say, a long time. And it came to a place where it really hasn’t brought us joy for a while, may I be so bold as to say it has been something we did because we always did it, and because it made money? We did good things with that money, but it had stopped bringing us joy. And last week, we chose not to do that this year. We are going to try something else! This decision wasn’t easy, but as I thought about it, it brought me so much joy that we were going to break out of the old and try something new! Something that will bring us joy!

And this is what the new faith in Christ that Paul had been teaching was all about ~ let’s not fade into old patterns of behavior ~ but continue to strive for more fresh views of God and Faith and love and

community! But humans are so tempted to want to sit still and create a trusted pattern, regardless of whether what they are doing is serving them well or bringing them joy. So what happens after we have made our declaration of life, when the “meantime” sets in? You know - that time when we aren’t doing something new, but not where we want to be yet.

This is where the Galatians were. They were on fire when Paul started them up and let them go - then he left, and they sort of got distracted by teachings from other people, which appeared to make sense! “So, Jesus was a good Jew, so we Gentiles should become Jewish and, like, get circumcised and everything . . . that makes sense . . .” But Paul was writing to tell them that they don’t have to do anything other than trust the Spirit of Truth that Christ gave us. Keep it simple, keep it true to Christ. But temptation is there for all of us, because we are all searching for self validation.

Henri J.M. Nouwen wrote:

“Over the years, I have come to realize that the greatest trap in our life is not success, popularity, or power, but self-rejection. Success, popularity, and power can indeed present a great temptation, but their seductive quality often comes from the way they are part of the much larger temptation to self-rejection. When we have come to believe in the voices that call us worthless and unlovable, then success, popularity, and power are easily perceived as attractive solutions. The real trap, however, is self-rejection. As soon as someone accuses me or criticizes me, as soon as I am rejected, left alone, or abandoned, I find myself thinking, “Well, that proves once again that I am a nobody.” ... [My dark side says,] I am no good... I deserve to be pushed aside, forgotten, rejected, and abandoned. Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us the “Beloved.” Being the Beloved constitutes the core truth of our existence.”

What happens in the meantime is that our voices of our own self judgment make us insecure that God could love us, and we go seeking some magic thing to do or say which will make us loveable. When in Christ, we are ~ just ~ simply ~ beloved ~ and “ALL” we have to do to know this is to trust the Spirit of the living God. Do not trust the voices of people telling us what we should or should not be doing. If we are all busy listening for the voice of Love we won’t have time to tell others what they should be doing better. We will be learning and living love and service without the need for our own ego to be validated.

This is the meantime practice which Paul calls us on today - have we been slipping into trying to reinforce our own, learned, human behaviors? Or are we striving every anew to see ourselves and each other as beloved lights of God, striving ever onward with our Jesus ~ who taught us that his followers have no place to lay their souls - for they are ever looking for the other souls that do not know they are Beloved by God!

Our calling as ones who know the Spirit of the living God is to keep that Spirit ever growing anew in boundary breaking ways! Breaking the human boundaries of judgment and division, and seeking ways to just be the healing, love of God. We heal ourselves when we seek to heal others of the fear that social mores will break our hearts.

So, in closing, we are always in the meantime. Because we aren’t “there” yet. And therefore we heed the call of Paul to be vigilant in trusting the powerful grace of God through Christ. Now and forever . . . AMEN