

Following the resurrection, the disciples were still scattered about Jerusalem and the surrounding villages. John finds Peter and runs up to him. Excitedly he says, "Peter, Peter! I've got some good news and some bad news." Peter takes hold of John and calms him down. "Take it easy, John. What is it? What's the good news?" John says, "The good news is Christ is risen." Peter says, "That's great! But, what's the bad news?" John, looking around, says, "He's really steamed about last Friday."

I am glad that next week is Pentecost because preaching on Galatians is actually quite hard. For one thing, Paul beats a dead horse when he goes on and on about works righteousness versus faith. If you are born and raised Lutheran, saved by grace, is drummed into us. Most of us would say that we are not saved by what we do. Now you see, we all could now go out for Ice Cream. I have entitled my message this morning, Law or Love. My hope is that God may use me to deepen your faith a bit this morning.

Here is a picture that man people have of God! Lightning bolts

This is a God of wrath. This is a God who punishes. This is a God who might get steamed about Good Friday! The Law then is done to avoid punishment. This is why none of you ever go over the speed limit. If a cop does nab you, who are you mad at, the cop, or yourself? Most of us blame the cop. But you see, you would never say to the police officer, I am so glad that you nailed me. I know that you really love me, and you know what, I love you to. Right. For you see, laws do not lead to love. Laws are necessary however. Martin Luther had 3 uses of the Law. I am simplifying them here.

The First Use is Curb.

This is known as Civil Use of the Law. It is made for good order. It is why we have stops and speed limits. It protects us and protects others.

The Second Use is Mirror

The law is seen a perfect in Christ. When we look into that mirror we recognize if we are honest how far short we find ourselves. This drives us to the need for the Gospel, for God's grace. So this use, the law convicts us of our sinfulness, and directs us to Jesus.

The Third use is Guide

This use is to show us what spiritual living is about. It doesn't save us, but guides us on how to live.

So laws have its uses. They are necessary. What messes us up, is when we confuse laws with love. Worse yet, when we link laws to being right with God. This is what Paul has in mind in Galatians 3:5

"Well 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 have heard?"

What are they believing? They are believing in John 3:16. They are believing in not only the words of Jesus but who Jesus is! Jesus is our savior because of what Jesus does! The cross is not only for our sins, it is also removes the barrier between God and humans. Remember when Jesus died, the veil on the tent is torn into.

This Jesus then moves from the external to the internal. Jesus is not out there somewhere. We are not on a five year mission into a final frontier. Jesus abides in us and we abide in Jesus. While we may call it faith, behind that faith is love. This is why if we stop and think about it, there is no rational explanation for why God puts up with us humans. Puppies would be easier. But God does so because God is a God of love. This God of loves wants to be in relationship with us. Just as you may love a spouse, a family member or a friend, this is what God desires for us.

Thus when we turn Christianity into a religion of laws, we no longer live out a life of love. We live to avoid punishment. We think we get heaven when we die and that becomes our focus. We forget that a life of love means that we create a bit of heaven in the here and now. It is helpful for us to look at Galatians 3:25-28 and we will take them one verse at a time.

So we read the following in Galatians 3:25-28

“But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian”

We are not talking about faith as a religion like the Christian faith. We are talking about a faith that is given as a gift by the One who came to save us. This makes God a God of love, not a God of wrath. Raise your hand if you have ever been blasted by Fire and Brimstone speech. Words matter. We can harm or we can help. One of the hardest things to overcome is anyone who has been wounded by the church. The church which is to be about love, too often is about law. You had better measure up or else. It can be something quite subtle actually. Is there a difference between sermon and message? Sermon means you are being preached at. Message implies there is something for us to hear. You may notice I have decided to not list sermon on the screen anymore. Next verse,

“For in Christ Jesus you are all Children of God through faith”

Notice what it doesn't say. You are children of God by following all the rules. Faith is twofold really. It is believing that the promises of God are true for you. It is trusting that when all is said and done, God is true to God's word. But it is more than that. Faith also leads to love. Think about this quite simply. Most of us have two selves. We have the outer selves we show the world. It is not only our faces but our actions and character. We also have our inner selves which contain a mixture of saint and sinner. The second use of the law, the mirror enters in. Isn't it one of the most amazing thing in the world that God knows who we are and God loves us anyway? When we grasp the depth of the great love God has for us, our only response is to love God back. This leads to our final verse,

“As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ”

This means that Christ dwells in us. If we clothe ourselves with Christ then we love as Christ would love. We stand up for poor and the outcast. We forgive not only each other but ourselves as well. We become people of love not of laws. We become merciful and grace filled. We love because he first loved us.

So if Christ dwells in us, it is important to ask the question which Jesus?

Rob Bell in his book Love Wins tells about an art show he had at his church. It invited people to bring art work to show what Jesus means to them. One of the pieces of art contained a very meaningful quote from Mahatma Gandhi. Someone had attached a piece of paper to it that read,

Reality Check: He's in Hell

Bell writes, Really? Gandhi's in hell? He is? We have confirmation of this? Someone knows this? Without a doubt? And that somebody decided to take on the responsibility of letting the rest of us know?

Is this the Jesus we would know? Or is the Jesus who stand with a bullhorn on his or her soap box letting all the people of the world know they are condemned. Or is it the Jesus who somebody said that Aids is God's way of punishment for gays?

So what is it to be a people of love? Well we have people who are wounded and people who want nothing to do with a wrathful God. Our response is to say, I wouldn't believe or have faith in that type of God either. My God is different than that. My Jesus is a Jesus of love. Amen.