

May 9 2021

Galatians 1:13-17, 2:11-21

Living by Faith

Children's Message: We finally got some scripture to reflect upon and make us think. There are so many lessons to draw out of this section of God's word. Bullying did exist in the early church as we will hear later. The answer to it is up to you and I and how we choose to respond to it. The Holy Spirit chose to use Paul to respond to it in the church. He would be the last person we would think of to do this. He was a person who hunted down Jesus's followers and had them imprisoned or killed. He was the one we would have thought to be on the side of the bullies. Yet he was not. The Holy Spirit used him to help Peter see the mistakes in his judgement. The Holy Spirit moves in amazing ways and uses the most unusual people to guide the church. The Holy Spirit is still in charge.

This reading makes us aware of how bullies work. That they sometimes work in groups to intimidate individuals. Just as they did with Peter. That bullies can influence people who are in positions of power and leadership. We are all just human and we can make mistakes. No one is perfect or infallible. Not even those who lead our churches today.

This reading also teaches us that we are all children of God. That we should not treat people differently because of what they eat or how they dress or how they look or where they are from. When we do

these things we are no different from the bullies in the reading this morning.

The big lesson is that the Holy Spirit is still in charge of the church. We are still guided by It. Regardless of how bad we screw it up the Holy Spirit is there to put us back on track. These little lessons are there to guide us through the difficult times in life. To provide clarity and wisdom so that we can live our lives to the fullest.

Adults Message: There is much going on in the early church at this time. It seems to be ripe with politics and bigotry. The church in Jerusalem which is full of Jewish Christians is trying to influence the church in Antioch. The Jewish Christians see the Gentile Christians as being unclean and want nothing to do with them. There is a huge issue of eating with the unclean Gentile Christians and excluding them from the Lord's Table. Ignorance and legalism seems to rule the church in Jerusalem and how it effects the development of the early church.

The issue in this morning's passage is how do you understand your faith and live it? Most of the time the problem is between what your heart feels and what your head knows. It can be hard to get each on the same page. The church is struggling with the implications and consequences of Our Lord's resurrection. If you believe that Jesus rose from the dead there are consequences of that belief. Our Lord's resurrection is the fulfillment of the old covenants with Abraham and Moses. His resurrection far exceeds them as the fullness of God's grace. John 1;16, "And of His fullness we have received grace upon grace." The covenant He made with us on Maundy Thursday is revealed in its fullness on Easter morning.

The problem now is, do you believe that Our Lord's resurrection fulfills and exceeds the old covenants? The resurrection has made all of creation anew and transformed everything. The old dietary laws have been fulfilled and exceeded in Jesus's resurrection. It is now okay to eat that bacon double cheeseburger. Is your faith strong enough to believe or do you have doubts? This is the problem the Jewish Christians are now having. This is the problem Peter and Barnabas are having thanks to the Jewish Christians from Jerusalem. Most of Peter's problems are political rather than religious.

I ask the question, where do Peter and Barnabas's doubts truly lie? They seem to be stuck back in the old Jewish dietary laws. Being stuck there denies what Jesus's resurrection has accomplished. All of creation is transformed and made clean. Could their fears be more practical? Do they not want to eat food that just might make them sick? Most of the dietary laws had a very practical purpose. Trichinosis could wipe out a large portion of people in the desert if they ate bad pork. Faith seems to have been replaced with politics, fear and bigotry. Gratefully they are not big enough problems for the Holy Spirit. Who moves the church forward and helps us to see our mistakes. Who uses the most unlikely people to make it happen. Most of the time in spite of ourselves. We still struggle with issues of faith today. I think that is the DNA of Christians. If we understood everything in church that would be knowledge and not faith. There are somethings we are not to know.

The thing I find today that stretches people faith is the forgiveness of their sins. Many people ask me if they are truly forgiven by God either after service or in confession. I always reply YES and try to encourage their faith and dispel their doubt. I am not the one doing the forgiving.

Our Loving God is the One at work here. Jesus reminds us in Mathew 16:19, "And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven." Sometimes the hardest thing to do is to forgive ourselves. We build amazing prisons in our minds for ourselves. When we can forgive ourselves, we can forgive others. When the words of absolution are said believe them to be true as if spoken by the lips of God. I am just the light switch, God is the power source.

Today we would not think of turning someone away from the Lord's Table. The Holy Spirit has led them to us for reasons we may never know or understand. Should we be that bold to question the work of the Spirit. It is always good to remember that one does not have to be Holy to partake of the body and blood of Our Lord. Yet once you have, it makes you Holy and Wholly. It is meant to be eaten and consumed and not to be worshipped. It transforms us from the inside out and makes us a new creation. We are reminded that we are part of the new covenant. The same one that exceeds and fulfilled the old ones. Thanks be to God.

On behalf of Charito and myself, we would like to wish all our mothers and moms a HAPPY MOTHER's Day. May God keep you healthy and happy.