

## “Can We Get Past Our Differences?”

Sermon by Lisa Crismore

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Galatians 3:23-29

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the laws 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 open in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring heirs according to the promise.

How many of you grew-up having rules in your house? These rules were either set by your mother and father or the head of the house. How many of you got in trouble when you disobeyed the rules? As adults, we no longer have to be concerned with the rules that our parent's or those raising us set for us. But, do they not stay with us?

I can hear my mom saying:

- “If you can't say anything nice about someone then don't say it at all.”
- “You don't have to like everything on your plate. You just have to eat it.”
- “Lying is the worst thing you can do. If you lie to me, I will find out about it and you will get twice the punishment.”

I would have to say that these rules took part in shaping me into the person who I am today. But, that is not the only thing that has molded me. It has been a collection of experiences, relationships with others and my faith in God that has made me.

Paul is writing to the church in Galatia. He is writing to set the record straight on what law or rules they are to follow. The law of the Jewish people, which was handed down from God to Moses, led them through the time of the Exodus all the way through to Christ coming. As children of God, they were guided and tutored by the law. They were disciplined by God to learn how to live as God's faithful people. But Paul is telling them there is a new way to live out your faith. When Christ came to live, die and be resurrected from the grave, everything changed.

Robert Bryant a commentator for Feasting on the Word writes, “For Paul, the true offspring of God are the faithful in Christ who trust in the living crucified Christ Jesus and exercise that trust in that they live. Faithfulness is now the basis upon which God's blessing is given and received. In Christ, a new people are formed. God's act of grace through Jesus has broken through the barriers of race, social position and gender – partitions that ordinarily foster inequality of injustice among individuals and communities. (Feasting on the Word- Year C, Volume 3; Robert A. Bryant; Westminster John Knox publisher; 2010; p. 164)

Paul is telling the people that they must grow up as children of God and become adults. As mature Christians, we have been baptized in Christ and thus clothed ourselves with Christ. There are no differences when it comes to Christ. Christ is all that matters.

How do we live out our faith in faithfulness when it comes to this? How do we live out the word of God in the church when it comes to Galatians 3:28? Hear this verse from The Message - "In Christ's family there can be no division into Jew or non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ."

This one is really hard! It is hard because as one commentator puts it, "We must move away from our stubborn self-centeredness! The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not about us!" It is about Jesus. (Feasting on the Word- Year C, Volume 3; Carol E. Holtz-Martin; Westminster John Knox publisher; 2010; p. 163)

And yet, we get so focused on our own agendas, our own ideas and our own values. Today, it may not be Jew or non-Jew, slave or free, male or female that we are divided on. But the issues that we face today are as serious to us as they were for the church in Galacia. They are rich or middle-class or poor, republican or democrat or independent, heterosexual or homosexual or bisexual or transgender, mentally healthy or mentally ill, legal immigrant or illegal immigrant, married or divorced or single, guns or no guns. These are the serious issues that divide us in our society. And most of these have divided us in the church where we claim to serve Christ.

How do we get over our differences? I want to share with you about my Spiritual Retreat which I experienced at Ghost Ranch 2 weeks ago. It was titled "The Art of Grateful Living: Finding Our Path in a Troubled World." Our week was focused on gratitude. Finding gratitude in the blessings and little surprises that God gives to us in our lives, finding gratitude in our pain and suffering and finding gratitude in the mundane, these are the areas where we searched to find thanksgiving from God.

One of the highlights of the week was watching a documented conversation between Brother David Steindl-Rast, a Catholic monk, and Jack Kornfield, a Buddhist Leader, speak on "The Practice of Grateful Living". Brother David spoke about the need to "STOP!" and look for the blessings. They are in every opportunity. You just have to be aware of them. Jack Kornfield agreed. He shared about an experiment that was carried out in 2007. The world famous violinist Joshua Bell spent morning rush-hour in a popular Washington DC subway playing amazing classical music. You would think he would have drawn a huge crowd. Out of 1,097 people who passed by him only 27 stopped to take in and enjoy his beautiful music. Most of them were children begging their parents to stop and hear this talented musician. ("The Practice of Grateful Living" DVD - gratefulliving.org / <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ew0czVtgMWM>)

Ann Voskamp, who is the best-selling author of the book "One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are", shared that a town took part in a study done on gratitude. For a month, the town's people had the option to write down each day - "3 things of gratitude". They had to focus on where they had seen God's blessings. They had to focus on positive thinking. So in a life style focused on gratitude, the researchers found after interviewing the people at the end that there was a higher level of alertness, enthusiasm and optimism. The people were more motivated, forgiving and likeable. They were more apt to volunteer and give back. (<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=WTShtEpMrto>)

During the course of the week, we each shared when we had experienced gratitude in the midst of great sorrow and pain. In every story that was shared, it was other people who showed kindness, love and mercy. I shared when my daughter was in middle school and was struggling with depression and social anxiety. As a parent, I was scared to death because I did not know how to help her. It was a wonderful therapist; a patient church youth director; and a creative speech teacher who all helped her find her way. For this, I was truly grateful and to remember this was rejuvenating.

One morning during our retreat, I picked up a quote from Brother David that said, "Gratefulness is that fullness of life for which we are all thirsting" (from [grateliving.org](http://grateliving.org)). As I spent the next hour reflecting on this, I couldn't agree more. We are so parched. We are so broken. We are so empty. As we take a drink of water after being so dry, we become hydrated. As a plant that needs water wilts, it is restored to new beauty when it receives a drink.

When we are so full of gratitude is there room for judgment when it comes to our differences? When we are so full of gratitude is there room for self-centeredness? As our nation struggles to wipe away our tears from a tragedy that took the lives of 50 people, we pray and we pray and we pray that we can learn from Christ teachings and be the face, hand and voice of Christ to others. May we be filled with gratitude in the times when we can agree to disagree without contempt in our hearts. We give thanks to God that in our imperfect humanness we are given grace upon grace upon grace through the love and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Amen.