

Time after Pentecost
The Reverend John H. Brock

Saturday, July 7, 2007
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Psalm 66:1-9; Galatians 6:1-16

Grace to you and peace from God who is who was and who is to come. Amen.

So tonight we heard from the last chapter of Paul's letter to the Galatians. We've been listening to it for the last several weeks and we come to the end. It's a really short letter; it's only six chapters long. I looked in my Bible; as a matter of fact I sat down and read through the entire book this afternoon. It took me about twenty minutes. It's really short, in my Bible with half pages of foot notes it's all of eight pages long. You can go home and read it in twenty-five minutes. It will be good for you, better than watching the sitcoms that are on television tonight.

But in this letter, Paul was addressing the congregations in Galatia and they've been having a problem. They've been accosted by believers who say that they have to believe in a certain way. That they have to do certain things, very specifically, these people are telling them that if you are a man you'd have to be circumcised. If you're a Christian there are certain dietary laws you need to pay attention to. And they've been so pervasive throughout Galatia that even Peter, Peter, yes the one who has always given 150%, the guy who denies Jesus. Peter, who had the vision if you remember the story from the book of Acts where Peter has a vision of this big sheet coming down from heaven and the voice saying to Peter that all things are now acceptable. Peter, when he comes to the churches in Galatia is convinced by these other folks that there are certain foods he shouldn't be eating and that he really shouldn't be eating with those Christians who aren't yet circumcised. The great thing about Paul is he's really not afraid of confrontation. He might have bad eye sight, but he's not afraid to get into somebody's face, and he goes up to Peter and confronts him and he says "What are you doing? Are you not the guy who had the vision? Are you not the one who proclaimed to all of us that all is okay? Everything is acceptable to God?"

And Paul, Paul confronts Peter, Paul confronts those who claim that these people need to be circumcised, and says no. If you're circumcised that's fine, but it's not a prerequisite. If there are certain foods you don't want to eat, that's okay, but it is not going to affect your faith. What's important Paul says is how we live. What's also important Paul says is how we respond to those who attack. To those who try to tell us, and Paul says we don't fight fire with fire. Paul says we respond with that spirit of gentleness. That over-flowing spirit of love. Not because we're weak, not because as believers we're supposed to be doormats. No, that's not at all what Paul means. But we stand up in faith. We stand up in the face of persecution. We stand up against wrongs being perpetuated in the name of our God. As Paul stood up to those who said that they had to be circumcised. That they needed to follow the laws of Moses or they wouldn't be saved. Paul says, no, it happened on the cross. Our salvation came when Jesus died.

What's important is not the things that we do; not how we worship or what we eat. What's important is how we take care of one another. What's important is now we look after those in

need. What's important is how we live our lives. If we live our lives for ourselves or if we live our lives for God. Because, as he says in verse 7, God is not to be mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap the corruption of the flesh, but if you sow to your spirit you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. If you're trying to follow the Law of Moses, then you've got to follow it all. You can't just pick and choose. If you want to follow those laws, that's okay, but you got to follow them all and no one has ever been able to fulfill all of them. Paul is trying to get them to understand that it's not any physical thing that they do, because it is nothing that they can do that will ever earn them God's love. There is no kind of mutilation of the flesh, no kind of dietary restrictions, no kind of prayers that will earn them God's love. But he reminds them that they don't have to. They do not have to, it doesn't matter he says for even the circumcised that do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised, may I never boast Paul says in 14, may I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. I cannot do anything, Paul says. It is only Christ who does it through me.

Now that's a little bit difficult for us to understand or maybe even for us to deal with. How does God do that through us? You know, last time I checked I hadn't gotten a fax from God. God's never called me on my cell phone; I've never gotten an email listing everything that I'm supposed to do. Rather God speaks to us when we speak to God. When we take the time, when we **make** the time to be in conversation, to be in prayer with God. When we **make** the time to read our scripture, when we **make** the time to care for those in need. That is when God talks to us. Not in any kind of an audible voice, although it might be in the voice of a stranger. Not in any kind of a message, although we may get a message from God. No, God will talk to us when we make the time to listen. God will talk to us even when we don't make the time to listen. But God calls us, calls us by our baptism, God calls us through the bread and wine. God calls us to be of service to all those around us. Not just our family, not just the members of Trinity, but to all of those in our neighborhood, at work, at school, to anyone in need. God calls us to be the hand of God in this world. That's what Paul is trying to get across to the Galatians and that's what those who are trying to turn the Galatians around don't understand. They want to focus on well, I need to be doing something. There's got to be a list somewhere, and Paul says no. There's only one thing, love your neighbor as yourself. You do that and you fulfill the gospel.

I don't think I can end this any better than what Paul himself says in verse 16 when he talks about loving your neighbor as yourself; for as all those who will follow this rule may peace be upon them and mercy and upon the Israel of God, for we who are baptized are that Israel. We who go forth in the name of God are those hands and eyes and ears. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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