

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Third Sunday after Pentecost - Year C

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

First Kings 19:15-16, 19-21

Psalms 16

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Luke 9:51-62

06/26/2022

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

51When the days drew near for [Jesus] to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. 52And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; 53but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. 54When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" 55But he turned and rebuked them. 56Then they went on to another village. 57As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." 58And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." 59To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." 60But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." 61Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." 62Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

The Gospel of Our Lord

## **Prayer**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

## **A Slave for Freedom**

Good morning! So... I don't like sharks. For my entire life I have been afraid of them. I think it has something to do with the fact that I can't swim that well, whereas sharks do, and water happens to be the exact place that I would run into one. I'm not sure how this came about, but it was so bad that when I was younger I wouldn't even go into Lake Erie because I was afraid that a shark would get me. But here's the thing... I also find them fascinating. Even while I was afraid I would still tune in every year for shark week. Did you know that we have had sharks on this planet longer than we have had trees?! And even though I hate scary movies, I would watch pretty much every scary shark film that came out. From *Jaws*, *Deep Blue Sea*, and recent additions like *The Meg*. It's in this newest one, early on in the movie, where we see a megalodon disturbed by explorers who then comes up for some fresh hunting. And, like all shark movies, we're in some underwater research facility where we watch a young girl with a bright flashing light toy walking along a glass tunnel... the Meg sees the light, and takes a gigantic bite, leaving huge teeth marks on the glass...

The little girl is fine, but the marks are a sign of something more to come... We see this sort of thing all the time in film, maybe in space or in water, small cracks in the glass that slowly grow... spreading along... until CRASH! The threat comes rushing in. It really is an in-breaking, something outside coming inside, crashing through to us. And while in this context, the in-breaking is a negative thing, it's a great analogy for how Paul understands the work of God. With Jesus Christ we have seen an

in-breaking of God's love for all things. Much like those initial cracks, those early signs of things to come, the life and ministry of Jesus Christ was just the beginning of what God was doing.

Have you ever read St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians? Listen again to a section from our second reading: *"<sup>1</sup>For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. <sup>13</sup>For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. <sup>14</sup>For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>15</sup>If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another."* Did you catch that strange idea in the beginning? We are no longer a slave, Christ has set us free... and yet we should become slaves? But first, let's back up...

Most of the scripture from the Second Testament that we read are actually letters written from one leader to a particular religious community, and Galatians is the same. Paul would have traveled to Galatia, in modern day Turkey, and just like he would have in any of the places he spread the word, would have spent between a few months to years building relationships in the community and teaching about Jesus Christ. After a time, when he felt that the community was ready, he would move on and go somewhere else to start it all over again. But he would keep in touch, writing the letters we have today to give advice to those fledgling communities in his absence.

Now, most of these letters are cordial, like in Romans. Some, like Philippians, are rich with love and affection... Then there's Galatians. In

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 5:1, 13-15 NRSV

this letter, Paul is LIVID. We get a glimpse of a VERY angry man who is not afraid to let the community know. But he's got a good reason. It seems that after he left, a group of different "Christians" have come in and contradicted what Paul told them. It would be like me going on a vacation or sabbatical and getting a letter halfway through that a bunch of new people joined the congregation, took over the council, and were changing all the rules. Now, this might not be that big of a deal if they were changing things like the color of the paint on the walls in the fellowship hall, but what is actually happening is much more theologically significant.

This group probably had Jewish roots too, and were advocating that if this "Christian" community really wanted to be faithful, they needed to follow the Law like all good Jews did. One needed to follow the rules, they argued. We don't know everything they advocated for, because this letter is a reply, but since St. Paul mentions specifically food practices and circumcision, we can assume they were at the top of this list.<sup>2</sup> Now, while dietary restrictions and circumcision might not seem like a big deal to us, they were signs of a fundamental difference in understanding for Paul. For these "teachers," it was only in following the law, these rules, that a Christian was able to show to God that they were obedient. But for Paul, they were confusing the order, essentially putting the cart before the horse. Instead of a BEHAVIOR showing God a person's faith, for Paul, a truly faithful person naturally showed a behavior that made that faith obvious.

It's tough to get, but it's central to many of the arguments that Paul gets into. He is arguing that rules can never lead us to salvation, only Christ can do that. But once we acknowledge that salvation, and give thanks for it,

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<sup>2</sup><https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-13-3/commentary-on-galatians-51-13-25-5>

we can begin to live our lives in RESPONSE to that gift with a life that reflects God's love in the world.

So what does Paul do? He flips the whole argument around. Sometime in the late 300's Saint Chrysostom summarizes it beautifully in his sermon on Galatians when he writes *“from this foolishness and conceit he is calling them to be slaves to one another. Therefore Paul applies this corresponding remedy: ‘Since you have been torn apart by your desire to rule one another, be slaves to one another. In this way you will be brought together again.’ He does not openly state their fault, but he states the remedy openly, so that through the remedy they may also better grasp the fault... He did not say ‘love one another’ but be slaves to one another, to express the most intense possible love.”*<sup>3</sup> ... Man, you gotta love that last line... *“Be slaves to one another, to express the most intense possible love.”*

For Paul, following God, being part of a community, can only work if we are willing to give up everything for God, even to the point of literal slavery, so that we can make sure our love is known. That's what Jesus is saying in the Gospel lesson today too, it's only when we willingly give up everything, that we can truly be free. Because at that point, the rules, the law, they become obsolete, I only do what is best for the community anyway. And notice that it only works if we ALL become slaves. If I submit, but you do not, the relationship is ruined. It needs EVERYONE stepping forward, caring for each other in the same way that God cared for us, to finally crack all the way through that glass. An in-breaking of God's love in the world. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup>Just, Arthur A. *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament VIII*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2003. pp. 81-82.