

Ordinary Time...Greening On Our Way!

"Are You Ready? You Know How!"

Galatians 5:1, 13-25; Luke 9:51-62

June 30, 2019

Before Galatians:

Paul's word to the community encourage them to note the distinction between motivating forces...forces that guide and shape community: flesh and spirit.

He is not denigrating the body or doing a shaming. When Paul uses the word flesh, it denotes worldly living, cultural pressures, behavioral choices.

The word spirit is about connection to holiness, oneness, your authentic self. Remember, Jesus calls our bodies temples and says he has come to teach us wisdom so that our joy may be complete.

Paul wants us to remain free from the warring of flesh and spirit and gives us pointers:
the only commandment we have is to love our neighbor as ourselves; and to be sure we are, we have the fruits of the spirit to guide us.

So listen resisting old ways of holding this passage as condemning of life but rather living life more fully!

Prompting:

Some back story to today's readings: Remember, Jesus did not come to start a new faith tradition.

He came to reform the practices of faith that were Jewish...for they were becoming more religious by adding laws but not necessarily more faithful to God's intention for all.

Jesus longed to bring their focus onto God's deepest desires for humankind for a life of freedom, justice, joy!

Qualities of life not a set of laws harder and harder to follow while concurrently over simplifying life choices.

But as reform began after his death, so did different understandings and sects based in different experiences of the faith thus far.

New Gentile converts to Christianity attending house churches, rejoice in this new spiritual experience of faith, but some problems exist.

So many of them are struggling (still struggling despite their faith) with problems of the flesh...human choices in a real, material world...behaviors including immorality and anger and jealousy and self-control...you know the list!

And so they wonder if there just might be the need for some more "laws" to help them find their way in their faith.

(How often we turn to form more laws when the answers already lie within.)

They turn to the group of Jewish Christians...another Christian sub-group that has developed a whole system of legal requirements and demands on their members...

as if more laws would bring more justice and fulfillment in life...we've visited this notion over the last several weeks and came to realize that people create justice, laws don't.

(You know...today there are still churches creating many more guidelines and laws and standards as if that is the long-term answer to the human struggle of the flesh. It's like we're more interested in blaming and shaming than caring relationships.

Look at the long debates about sexuality and women's health care and denominations making laws making some outlaws ...laws that have stolen energy away from ministry. They are devouring each other...as Paul warns!

Often adding laws puts the focus on the wrong stuff, judging neighbors and strangers, diluting the effectiveness of the church as it undermines Jesus message.)

But people being people, some Gentile Christians submit to these laws and great discord and confusion result.

Paul hears of this and regards it as a great misinterpretation of Jesus' teachings and God's deepest desires for God's people.

In a sense, they squander their new freedom in the faith and enslave themselves to a different slave master...more laws.

And what are the fruits of this decision?

They argue and vie for their position being the right position. They "bite and devour" each other.

There is actually less freedom.

Paul says...remember...the only law is to love your neighbor as yourself. This is the only way to experience the kingdom here on earth. It has nothing to do with institutional laws. He goes on...

Not so sure if you're free, if you're tending to false standards, if you're following laws that don't yield justice and joy?

Look at the fruits of your practice.

If the fruits of your choices aren't the fruits of the spirit, then you are adhering to the wrong religious principles and following rules of the flesh...

human rules and behavioral choices that may be self-centered and are short-sighted.

The flesh (our choices) and the spirit are to work hand in hand to balance each other and guide us.

Like touchstones...like holding ourselves accountable.

There is a relationship between the quality of your life and how you live out your faith.

When your faith lives out in all aspects of your life, it will unify your life...simplifying it.

The way you do anything, is the way you do everything!!

So, for example,
if you say you love kids...love your own kids or nieces and nephews or grandkids or friend's kids,

and so you show them kindness (a fruit of the spirit) when they are well behaved

but yell at them/demean them when **you** are having a bad day or *they* do a kid thing...

OR

if you are kind to children here but refuse to support the new school bond, for example, cause your kids are no longer in school...

You are being inconsistent. You are about only you.

Not living your faith.

Your fruits rot on the vine

or got picked before they were ripe!

(To be blessed in Aramaic is to be ripe for the picking!)

You are not letting the fruits guide you to the bigger picture of life: Loving your neighbor as you love yourself.

Your neighbor? Whoever is standing within 3 feet of you at any moment.

More than the person next door

(who probably is a lot like you cause you chose your neighborhood on purpose!).

If your faith doesn't help you examine the choices you are making,

**doesn't invite you to "freedom from"
and then "direction toward"**

what is life giving in this moment and more importantly the next...

**Paul says you then have only traded
one master for another.**

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Jesus is about freedom from the tyranny of false masters...within us and around us!  
So...

Jesus was about to turn his travels toward Jerusalem moving toward Passion Week and through Passover.

He travels through Samaria on his way...a country of Jews who practiced differently than the Jerusalem Jews...  
different laws...

a place deemed unfriendly to foreigners,  
especially pilgrims assumed to be traveling  
to the religious festival in Jerusalem

...which is what they assumed Jesus was doing as well.  
And he was!

The disciples were outraged at their lack of respect and reception and felt retaliation was appropriate...

“they” don't believe the right way/have the right laws!

They knew Jesus had the power to retaliate! Don't we all?! Doesn't our church, city, country?

But instead, Jesus rebukes them...and moves on.  
Like:

“Get over it! They don't get it...yet...but we do!  
Don't let your energies be diverted to such pettiness!  
Don't let your ego devour you!

Look at the fruits that choice would bring...  
resist enslaving yourself to your anger's false pride!”

Jesus travels on and many are drawn to His charisma,  
His message, His community.  
I know I would have been...wouldn't you?

They ask to go with him and he reminds them that means giving up your usual home,  
your usual way of doing things,  
your usual sphere of influence.  
Your chosen neighbor.

And then, he asks them...invites them...to do what they say they want to do...follow  
him. And their response?

Oh, sure, but let me return home first...  
Oh, sure but let me return home to finish mowing the lawn. Oh, sure, but let me say  
good-bye to mom and dad...  
then I'll be right back.

Funny, how often when someone says ok to what we are asking, we shy away...as if we  
asked because we didn't expect the yes!

I don't know about you, but anytime anyone has ever said  
to me...yes, but let me just go check on my dad  
or say good-bye to my sister...  
well, somehow they just never seem to materialize.

Can I help you paint the downstairs? Sure. Great, just let me go back home and  
change...or give me a call when you want me...and I'll be right there...*not!*

I'd be glad to visit so and so, just let me finish my chores around home and I will go.

I'm going to do my homework just as soon as I finish watching this one show.

I'll be home for dinner just as soon as I finish this one last thing.

I'll sign up to do that just as soon as everyone else has had a chance to sign up for their  
fair share first.

I'll pray as soon as I have time.  
I'll be at church as long as the sun doesn't shine.

I'll stop over-eating as soon as I finish eating the groceries I just bought.

I'll.....

No one loves family and children more than Jesus.  
No one was a more devoted son than Jesus.  
Jesus is not doing a “teaching” about family here.

He's helping us see how we misuse very important things  
to satisfy our own hesitations...  
how we use them for an excuse not to commit.

And He's right, these are not easy choices.  
And He is right, sometimes you choose away from family and the familiar in order to  
follow, to live your own truth.

And He's right:

You can't plow a row, walk in a straight line,  
move into your future in God...if you're looking back.

When will you be ready to look forward?

What great excuses has your gifted imagination come up with?

Are you ready yet...for the “good” life?  
To live the fruits of the spirit?  
To put aside that which is unimportant and the arguing?

Thing is: God is...and will always be ready for you to look ahead, live into freedom,  
enjoy the fruits of the spirit.

God is ready, willing, and has a plan for your well-being which necessarily depends on  
you!

Are you ready... yet?

You already know how to begin to be that new  
human being Jesus invites you to become!