



SUNDAY SERMON

Forget the Rules and Follow God

Good Morning Friends. We're going to start this morning's homily with a little bit of group participation. I'm going to invite you to turn to a few of the people you're sitting next to and I'm going to ask you to do three things:

1. Say Hello and Introduce yourself
2. Tell them "I'm glad you came to church this morning"
3. And now here's the challenge: discuss in your little group the question "What is the best thing about a life of faith?"

Ok – I'm going to give you three ish minutes to discuss. Go.

So how was that conversation? Anyone want to shout out a few of your answers. Open the floor.

Chances are that no one here... or at least very few people probably said "the rules" are the best thing about a life of faith.

It's true - We Westerners are not big on the idea of rules. With just a quick search on google – I typed in "quotes on rules" with no other qualifier and these are a few of the first rules that popped up:

"Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist." – P. Picasso;
"Rules are meant to be broken." "Know the rules well, so you can break them effectively." – Dalai Lama. "Any fool can make a rule... And any fool will mind it."
– Henry David Thoreau.

What these quotes and this last one in particular from Thoreau seem to be getting to the heart of is our culture's strong belief that rules, while unavoidable, are not the goal of life. Rules are simple, rules have an agenda, but rarely is that agenda transcendence or transformation or even radiance. Rules are the mud underneath a foundation, not the peak of the mountaintop.

It is along this line of thinking that Paul writes his letter to the Galatians. It may sound shocking to hear but Paul this morning is saying "Would you forget about the rules already! What God is doing is So much bigger than that."

A little back story - The church in Galatia has received word from other missionaries that the true way for them to experience and express their faith in Christ Jesus is by adhering to the law of Moses. The Christians in Galatia are earnest in their faith; they want to live a "life of faith" the right way, so they listen to the missionaries and begin adopting the various laws of Moses, including observing the rite of circumcision.

continued

DATE

Pentecost 4
Sunday, July 7, 2019

PREACHER

The Rev. Amy Molina-Moore

St. Columba's
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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Upon hearing of such practices I imagine that the Galatians assumed that Paul, himself a circumcised Jew, would commend the Galatians for adopting this ancient sign of faithfulness and commitment to God... but that's not what happens. Instead Paul seems to lose his mind in frustration. The text itself clues us into the fact that Paul probably have worked himself up into a frenzy - his penmanship getting more animated causing him to remark "See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand!"

And why is Paul frustrated that these Christians are trying to follow the ancient laws that guided their own savior? It's because Paul thinks the attention to the laws are a distraction from the bigger picture. Jesus' life, death and resurrection ushered in a new era announcing new rules of engagement between the divine and the human. With the Spirit and the Messiah, there's direct access to God in a way that relies on human openness and trust in the here and now. It means trusting that God is present every day, That God is restoring the world to love every day, speaking into lives and reminding folks that they are made in the image of God every day.

Such a faith is not about looking backwards, but about looking forward; about being open and receptive to the unfolding of the ways of God. This is a responsive, attentive, evolving faith that only works if the faithful are on the lookout for holy moments. Awake, Present, Grateful, Open - These are the types of habits that Paul would like the Galatians to be cultivating ; practices that speak to the family of faith that God is calling them to be rather than forcing them into a pre-existing faith mold.

For sure there is nothing wrong with following a strict diet, wearing particular garments or even getting circumcised – but those rules in 1st Century Galatia were constricting rather than freeing. Men and the women who loved them would see the requirement for circumcision and think – well I guess I or my family can never be Christian even though this Jesus guy sounds awesome. For Paul this was unacceptable. He recognized that anything that kept people from knowing Jesus, anything that didn't offer people the freedom to get to know God's transforming, reconciling love was a barrier that needed to be removed, no question.

This morning Paul invites us to consider how ours is a faith that meets people where they are and asks them to do more than follow the rules; asks them instead to be open to the Spirit of God whose fruits we will know by their love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

I started our time together this morning by asking you all earlier what is the best thing about a life of faith. And here's the answer for me - The best thing about a life of faith is the freedom that it brings me. There is so much freedom in this skin of mine because I know where my worth comes from and it doesn't come from any human metric. There is so much freedom I feel to take risks in relationships, because I know I am ultimately loved even if I am rejected by another human. Freedom to be generous because I know that the truth is that God has filled the world with good things and the narrative of scarcity and competition is a lie. Ultimately I'm free to pursue all that is lovely, peaceful, and true because those are the things of God and free to reject all that is not and what a thrilling, freeing sort of faith that is. Amen.