

Sunday closest to June 22

Proper 7

Year C

RCL

[Isaiah 65:1-9](#)

[Psalms 22:18-27](#)

[Galatians 3:23-29](#)

[Luke 8:26-39](#)

The story goes that an anthropologist studying the habits and customs of an African tribe found himself surrounded by children most days. So he decided to play a little game with them. He managed to get candy from the nearest town and put it all in a decorated basket at the foot of a tree.

Then he called the children and suggested they play the game. When the anthropologist said "now", the children had to run to the tree and the first one to get there could have all the candy to him/herself.

So the children all lined up waiting for the signal. When the anthropologist said "now", all of the children took each other by the hand ran together towards the tree. They all arrived at the same time divided up the candy, sat down and began to happily munch away.

The anthropologist went over to them and asked why they had all run together when any one of them could have had the candy all to themselves.

The children responded: "Ubuntu. How could any one of us be happy if all the others were sad?"

Some of you may have heard of Ubuntu, a South African philosophy, which appeared in sources in the mid-19th century. It was used heavily then as a guiding principle for transition out of apartheid. It has many definitions, but one that is particularly relevant to us today is how Desmond Tutu would define it, saying, "Ubuntu means my humanity is inextricably bound up to yours. That we all belong to a greater whole, and when others are diminished we are too."

Those in ancient Galatia were faced with a similar problem. They were faced with the important question: who are the people of God? Or what makes a person beloved of God? Paul visited and stayed with the Galatians. During his time there, he brought the Good News of Christ to them. And they took to it willingly and openly. But some time later, a group of people brought another

Gospel with a different set of truths. Their Gospel included the differing idea from Paul that for a Gentile to become a Christian, one must first be circumcised and follow the Law- the Torah also known as the Mosaic Law.

Paul wasn't pleased. For Paul, the law isn't always a bad thing. Before he became an evangelist to the Gentiles, he was a Pharisee and upheld the law. The law is our story and our history as a church. But the law can be negative when the law keeps people out. When the law excludes people from the table, from the community. When the law is held and lifted above all things including people. And so Paul uses this portion of his letter to Galatia to tell the Galatians just that. Paul's logic is sometimes difficult to follow, and we can get stuck in the weeds. His main argument, and most scholars agree, is that Abraham was given righteousness through faith, and faith in Jesus is the distinguishing quality that we hold to that welcomes us in the household of God- not law, not circumcision, not being chained up by some belief. Paul's idea is that we all existed under the law. The law existed for a specified time (until faith and Christ's coming), and that God was continually working toward

a fulfillment of the promises to Abraham by sending Jesus. In the person of Jesus, we don't have to rely on or depend on the law, because in faith we have something greater, something which frees us instead of holds us in bonds.

This is all to say that the true thrust of his argument is that we are all beloved of God, and the household of God is one of unity, not separateness, one of freedom, not of oppression, and one where everyone gets to be a part of.

This passage and this letter changed the life and the movement of that early church. Who gets to be a part of the love of God or the faithfulness of Christ? not just one specific group of people. It's everyone. We, as a local church, and as the Episcopal Church, know this. I know I'm preaching to the choir. It's something that we are used to saying and believe. But this letter was cutting edge, ground breaking, world changing when he wrote it. It pushed back on the boundaries and the systems of those times. It was absolutely and utterly revolutionary. There is truly no division in God. When the church is at its best, we represent openness, inclusivity, love and grace. When evil and hate strike our world, and our LGBTQIA brothers and sisters are murdered, we stand beside them in prayer and action renouncing what has happened.

It's far easier to do nothing of course. In the light of the Gospel, we see a person with a problem being shackled to it, oppressed by what ailed him. We see him relegated to death, to the tombs by those the community he was a part of. According to Fred Craddock, instead of speaking to it and coming face to face with the problem and the evil, the community guarded it. Kept their focus on the wrong thing. But like Paul, Jesus doesn't give them or us a chance to skirt the hard questions. Jesus has compassion and encounters the situation at hand. He speaks to it. And instead of ignoring it, instead of guarding it and being happy to just chain it up and forget about it, Jesus releases it.

And that's Paul's whole point in all of this. Everyone we meet is part of us- Ubuntu. Jesus showed us, and we seek to live it out- there are no barriers- no jew or greek, slave or free, male or female. We are all united and one in God. Because grace isn't restricted by law or by chains or by a group a people who claim to know who God is. There is no division in God. There is oppression

and hate and crimes against humanity in this world that we cannot seem to free ourselves from as a society.

We still grieve from last week. And our grief will stay with us for a long time.

But the response and love to what happened has been great. Hundreds of people lining up for miles to give blood. People reaching out to their senators to stop this senseless violence. A man, driving 1200 miles to set up homemade crosses as memorials. A theater troupe, protecting the funerals from Westboro. Love being given and shared- relationships being held, knowing that there is no us or them, and that no one is alone. For how could all of us be happy if one is sad?

No one is excluded from God's love and grace- even when we as humans try to stop it. Jesus responded to this. Paul responded to this. How will you?