



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Sunday, May 29-June 4 (C) – Galatians 1:1-12

Focus: *Inclusion, not Exclusion*

word of life

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel” Galatians 1:6 (NRSV)

Read Galatians 1:1-12

Over the course of the next six weeks, the assigned readings for the second lesson are all from Paul’s letter to the Galatians. Luther called this letter “my little letter to which I have entrusted myself. It is my Kate von Bora” (the name of Luther’s wife). (*Quote from Galatians by Edgar Krentz, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament, © 1985.*) Luther’s fondness for Galatians reflects the powerful message found in the letter. It is a pivotal New Testament writing on the unity and inclusivity of the Christian community, on the understanding of Christian freedom, and on what it means to be a follower of Christ.

1. *Do you have a favorite book of the Bible “to which you have entrusted yourself”? If so, what is it, and why?*

Paul wastes no time getting to the issues to be addressed in the letter to the Galatians. The conventional form of letter-writing in his day was to begin by identifying the source of the letter and its intended recipients, then continue with words of praise and thanks and a prayer for those receiving it. But in Galatians, Paul begins with words validating his ministry credentials: “Paul an apostle—sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father....” (Galatians 1:1 NRSV) Clearly, Paul and his message are under attack, and this letter is written to defend his message and confront those who distort it. The confrontation is further articulated in verse 6: “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel” (Galatians 1:6 NRSV)

2. *Imagine being a member of the church in Galatia receiving this letter from Paul. What do you think your reaction might be to his words?*
3. *How do we deal with confrontation in the church? What can we learn from Paul’s approach?*

Paul’s letter to the Galatians is not a philosophical reflection on a general understanding of faith; rather, it is addressed to a particular people dealing with particular issues in a particular situation. We will read in later chapters that the particulars being addressed have to do with Jewish Christians in the community who insist that converts to the Christian faith must follow Jewish law regarding circumcision and dietary regulations in order to be full participants in the church.

It is a common struggle throughout the church’s history to not be limited by one’s own perspective and culture. But the incredibly freeing message of the gospel is that God is not limited by race or class or ethnicity. The true gospel is one of inclusion, not exclusion – of freedom, not limitations.

4. *Explain the phrase “the true gospel is one of inclusion, not exclusion.”*
5. *Why do you think we put limits on God?*

Paul doesn’t mince words in addressing the issue. If anyone proclaims a gospel contrary to the one of inclusion and unity – even if it comes from an angel in heaven – “let that one be accursed.” (Galatians 1:8-9 NRSV) The stakes are too high. The all-inclusive message of the good news of Jesus Christ is being limited by cultural and ethnic perspectives. A word of confrontation has to be spoken.

6. *What kind of response might Paul have received from his words of confrontation?*

word *among us*

The woman stormed into the pastor's office after the worship service was over. "How can you allow it?" she asked. There was indignation in her voice; she was visibly upset. "I've been a member of this church all my life, and I've never seen anything like it." "Like what?" the pastor asked. "Don't tell me you didn't see the acolyte this morning." The pastor nodded and smiled. Nathan was a new member of the church. He was excited to be a part of the church family. He eagerly volunteered to serve as an acolyte and was active in the youth group.

Nathan also was a fan of punk rock, and his dress and hair style reflected his musical tastes. He had shown up at church that morning with one side of his hair groomed in a tall spike, and the other side dyed in bright purple color. His acolyte robe covered his stylish jacket and pants, but the robe seemed to only accentuate his dramatic hair. "He shouldn't be allowed to be in front of the church with hair like that. It just isn't right!" the woman exclaimed.

The pastor responded in a calm yet determined voice. "But is it right to deny people the opportunity to share their gifts in the church just because they don't fit our understanding of what is acceptable?" the pastor said. "Doesn't the gospel tell us that all are welcome and included in the community of faith?"

1. *Can you relate to the woman's indignation?*
2. *Can you think of other times when our expectations limit our experiences of God's grace?*

The apostle Paul addresses a similar situation in the church in Galatia. The church was founded on the gospel message that all are to be included, that all are welcome. Yet there were some who were trying to limit the limitless grace of God.

It happens in our world as well. There are distortions of the gospel message today clamoring for our attention and allegiance. We unwittingly draw lines of exclusion based on race, socioeconomic status, and cultural traditions. We become limited by our historical perspective and by our ethnic roots. We sometimes unknowingly (and sometimes deliberately) put limitations on the gospel and distort its message of inclusion. Paul's message to the Galatians is one we need to hear today: "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel" (Galatians 1:6 NRSV)

3. *How else are we inclined to distort the gospel message?*
4. *What part of Paul's message needs to be proclaimed today?*

faith practice *in daily life*

Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed

The good news of God in Christ is good news for all. Yet we sometimes put limitations on the gospel message. We expect others to be "like us," to look "like us," and to dress "like us." Such limitations are not true expressions of the gospel. When, in word and deed, we proclaim the good news of God in Christ, we can't help but be inclusive and welcoming to all. For God in Christ has welcomed and included us.

5. *What words best proclaim the good news of God in Christ?*

Prayer

Help us, O God, to be true to the good news of your welcoming of all. Forgive our limitations and acts of exclusion. Make us a welcoming community, that all may see your grace. Amen

last word

Think of ways this week you can include others.