

Trinity 13

I take as my text today, from St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians:

TO Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in Thy Sight, O Lord my Strength and my Redeemer.”

Service, Faith, and Love: that is what ties the Collect, Epistle, and Gospel together, for seemingly they are unrelated.

While the Collect may seem to indicate that the promise of eternal life is a reward for faithful service to God, that is misleading.

Perhaps, it would be more obvious if we approached the Collect from the standpoint of “selfless giving of ourselves” in faithful service; that would better clarify what is meant by “true and laudable service.”

On the other hand, the Gospel points us to Love through the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

How often do we hear the words: “Love thy neighbor as thyself”. Certainly each and every time we celebrate the Holy Eucharist. But who is our “neighbor”? How often do we consider what that means? Indeed, how do we perceive “neighbor”?

In our Gospel, with the Parable of the Good Samaritan, we see a perfect illustration of the concept of “neighbor” from the Christian standpoint. The Parable provides an answer that so many people do not want to hear, the very answer that is in opposition to the belief and practice of

some of the other religions in the world, and increasingly contrary to the actions and attitudes of many in our own country.

The Gospel from St. Luke gives us a very simple answer: whoever needs me.

Indeed, there can be no other answer, if God's Love is to flow into and through us; if we have put our faith in God and his Son Jesus Christ.

However, there is something else at play: motivation. What is it that motivates people to be benevolent and loving? Is it a set of laws? Can benevolence and love be codified?

Of course not. Christian benevolence and love are derived from faith. Not a faith in a system of laws, but a faith in God, a loving God.

And that is what we find at the heart of Paul's Letter to the Galatians.

It is not the Law that saves us. Our salvation is dependent entirely upon God's Grace. It is not something that we can earn. All that we can do is to accept God's Love by an act of faith.

Paul was writing to the Church at Galatia, where a certain segment of the Church, known as Judaizers, were claiming that the only way to become a Christian was first to become a Jew.

To this concept Paul was vehement. No, you've got it all wrong, he says to the Judaizers. The Gospel is for the whole world, for the Gentile as well as the Jew. It supersedes, or completes the Law of Moses.

The Judaizers wanted the Christian converts to conform first to the Law in order to be brought under the Gospel. Paul says it doesn't work that way, and goes about refuting the proponents of the Law who stood as a barrier to the Good News that was Christ.

Was Abraham under the Law, Paul asks? Of course not. The law was given to Moses more than 400 years after Abraham.

It was the Promise that was given to Abraham, given to him for his faith, and that Promise was to be fulfilled in his seed. Indeed, the seed is the Promise, and that Seed is Jesus Christ.

It was faith, a sublime act of faith that saved Abraham.

Why, then, the Law?

Foremost, the Law teaches us what sin is. Without the Law, how would we know sin?

God gave us the Law through Moses as the mediator. He did not give it to us directly, but through a mediator.

Once we came to know, through the Law, what sin is, we found out something else: it is impossible to keep the Law perfectly. We can never not sin.

So, we also learn from the Law our human helplessness. That knowledge, according to Paul, should drive us to seek God's Grace through Faith.

From Paul's disputation comes to light something most wonderful. It is the Promise, the Promise made to Abraham. It was not an agreement on law that involves two people. It was not reciprocal. It was a promise made. From God to Abraham. One to one. It was God's promise. In this promise to Abraham, God gave us his Grace and Love, without which there is no salvation.

We may break the Law but God will never break his promise. His Grace is always there. His Love is ever present. It is ours through faith.

The Judaizers, while accepting Christianity, failed to fully make the connection. They could not let go of the Law, but clung to it in futility

They could not see that it is not the circumcision of the flesh, but the circumcision of the heart upon which the Promise is made.

It is not the Law, but the Grace and Love of God.

It is not the mediation of Moses, but Jesus Christ as our Mediator through Whom the Law is fulfilled and the Promise kept.

It is a New Covenant and a new relationship with God predicated upon love.

Thus, we are no longer held prisoner to sin, but are freed by God's Grace and Love. It is the fulfillment of his promise made to Abraham whose faith in selfless service to God is a first example for us.