

## Sermon

Sunday, June 23, 2019 (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Pentecost)

Preacher: Rev. David Martin

St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Albuquerque, NM

Reading: Galatians 3:23-29

Theme: Wouldn't It Be Nice?

What would it be like if we were to live as the Bible tells us?

There are a couple of popular books in which the authors attempted to do exactly that.

The Year of Living Biblically: One Man's Attempt to Follow the Bible as Literally as Possible was written by A. J. Jacobs in 2007. At the time, Jacobs was the editor of *Esquire Magazine*. The book seems to be written for two reasons:

1. To set up funny situations for laughs (throwing pebbles at a co-worker he assumes is having an affair, searching for clothing which does not contain mixed fibers)
2. And to point out the hypocrisy of some Christians who cherry-pick rules from the Bible. Jacobs wants to tell us you can't follow some rules to the letter without following them all in the same manner

In 2012, Rachel Held Evans wrote, A Year of Biblical Womanhood: How a Liberated Woman Found Herself Sitting on Her Roof, Covering Her Head, and Calling Her Husband Master. Evans explained she wanted to explore the reasons some of her female college friends were foregoing their careers to stay home and raise children because their churches told them it was the right thing to do.

Unlike Jacobs who wrote for jokes, Evans wanted to explore what the Bible truly expected of women – growing her hair out, making her own clothes, obeying her husband, abstaining from gossip – to deeper understand her own faith as a questioning Christian woman. But once again, many of the virtues she found in the Bible are explored with humor and skepticism.

But back to my opening question: What would it be like if WE were to live our lives as the Bible tells us?

I'm not talking about following rules to the letter. I'm talking about taking what we read – not just commandments - and apply them to our lives today.

In today's letter to the Galatians, Paul starts by talking about the law. He's reminding the new Christians in Galatia how it had been important for Jews to follow all the laws from the Torah – the Old Testament. However, those laws were simply a vehicle to bring all of them to Christ. Without the laws, they wouldn't have been ready to receive Christ into their lives. But now that we have faith in Christ, the old laws are not the most important thing.

Paul tells us that since we are baptized in Christ, we are now clothed in Christ. And now that we are clothed in Christ, we are all one in Christ.

Differences cease to exist now that we are all one in Christ.

Paul clearly states: there is no longer Jew or Greek. There is no longer slave or free. There is no longer male and female.

We are all the same.

On his blog, "One Man's Web," priest and theologian Andrew Prior explains Paul's bold statement. In the first century, saying that there is no difference between Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female, undercuts the very foundation of the world.

I suspect that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, saying everyone is the same in Christ, would have the exact same outcome. It would undercut the foundations of our society.

Let's return to my first question again. What would it be like if we were to live as if there is no difference between anyone who is different than us? What would it be like if we lived like all people are equal? What would it be like if we lived without inequality of any kind?

What would it be like? Would it even be possible?

No longer Jew or Greek. As Paul was assisting early Christians in their quest to follow Christ, there were a lot of debates. Now that some Jews were following Christ what would happen if non-Jews – the Greeks, the Gentiles – also wanted to be Christian. Some thought they would first need to convert to Judaism. And then some thought that meant the men would have to be circumcised. In his bold statement, Paul is telling the Galatians none of that discussion matters. It just doesn't matter now that we are all one in Christ.

In the statement "no longer Jew or Greek", Paul is telling the world that God has no interest in social delineation. Our identity has nothing to do with being Jew, or Greek, or any other kind of difference. Paul states that we are all "in Christ" – part of the new community which God has established.

Social delineation is a human construct. It is an "us against them" mentality. But through Christ, God has begun a new creation. And there is no room for ethnic or national identity in the future God wishes for us.

For us here this morning it is easy for us to read Paul's words "no longer Jew or Greek." However, what do you think about saying no longer American or Iranian? Jew or Palestinian? Can we so easily say no longer Christian or Muslim? And does "no longer refugee, immigrant, asylum seeker or citizen" roll of our tongue easily enough that we can live it in our lives today?

Think about it. Can you really live your life as if no one is any different from you?

"No longer slave or free." When Paul wrote these words in the first century, it was a blow against the entire economic system of the world. The ancient world's commerce depended on free slave labor to make things work. If there was no longer a difference between slaves and free people, who was going to do all the work? And those people who did the work would now expect to be paid. Paul was radical.

We assume our current economic system no longer depends on slave labor. But is that true? All the wonderful affordable disposable items we mindlessly buy every day is most likely manufactured in a country with much less stringent work laws than the United States. That's why they are so affordable and appealing to us.

If we truly lived our lives as there was no longer slave nor free wouldn't we insist on buying only products made by companies who pay their employees a fair wage – no matter where they lived?

And even closer to home, wouldn't this phrase by Paul changed into "no longer employer and employee?" If we truly took this new directive to heart, a boss has no more right to money and privilege than those working under her. She and all her employees have a right to earn a living and provide for their families. After that, they would all have an equal responsibility to their fellow humans and to the earth.

Can we truly live as if everyone no matter where they fall on the pay scale – no matter if they even have a job – are equal to each other?

No longer male and female. I wonder if you've noted that the previous "opposites" have been separated by the word "or?" But these gender words are separated by an "and" instead. Because male and female are not opposites like the other phrases. Male and Female were meant to be compatible. In Genesis 1:27, we read:

*"God created humankind in his image  
In the image of God, he created them  
Male AND female he created them."*

Later, in the third chapter of Genesis, we hear the story of the serpent tempting Eve. The Eve tempting Adam, and Adam taking the apple. This begins our long history of being fundamentally drawn to creating binary opposites rather than working together as we were created. Look at our political system. It is built on the concept of Democrats against Republicans. Instead of people working together as we were created "male and female", our government is totally based on opposition.

God created compliments – male and female. We have subverted that creation into opposites. What Paul has to say is revolutionary for his time....and for our own time as well. Men's power over women – the most basic example of subversion of the way God created the world – is being overthrown.

In Paul's world, religion and politics were one in the same. So what Paul is stating in this passage isn't just spiritual advice or a declaration of faith. This erasure of what were perceived as opposites is for the entire reality of the existing world.

Today – in our world – we say that politics and religion are not at all connected. Anyone who's even half-awake knows that is not the case. But still, our society like to divide things into opposites. It's always me against you. Them against us.

Is it possible to live our lives as if gender and gender identity made no difference? Can we throw away our desire to oppose one another?

Here's what Paul is saying to the Galatians. And this is what God is saying to you today.

God simply loves you. The old way of doing things is done. You don't have to follow the rules any longer because you are made new in Christ. The old laws which you had to follow have brought you to this place and are not important any longer. Societal norms which direct our lives – Jew/Greek, free/slave, male/female are not important either. They mean nothing in God's love.

We love to divide. We love opposition. We love pitting one thing against another.

But the Spirit of God isn't like that. God wants us to unite and nurture our relationship with God and with one another. We are called to build up. We cannot unite...and nurture...and build up...by submitting to any kind of division. Baptism in Christ is overthrowing that old way of doing things – dividing people into opposite categories. Our discipleship in Christ depends on us joining that revolution.

So, what does it look like if we live as the Bible tells us? It looks like one loving, united, nurturing group of people working toward building the kingdom of God here on earth. It looks like all of us working against division and traveling a journey to a place where we are all the same.

Will we create that place? We are only human. We can only try. As fallible humans we will try and fall short. But we are called to keep trying and doing the best we can. This world of division and opposition is deep in our DNA. But we must get up every morning and try again to live in discipleship with Christ -- with one another -- and work to end division.

Get up every morning and try again; that is what it looks like to live as the Bible tells us.