



## *Living in the freedom of Grace*

### **Main Point:**

In his letter to the church in Galatia,  
Paul now explains the faulty gospel that they have believed.

We are not saved through striving to be good and acceptable before God,  
but through faith in the free gift of grace offered by Jesus through his death and resurrection.

Greetings my brothers and sisters in Christ, what a joy it is to be here, as we come together to worship and give thanks to God and the life-giving gift of the Holy Spirit. Last week we celebrated the Holy Trinity, this week we celebrate the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost were our bible readings have a message to us about Faith, community and humanity.

I pray, that today's message, will lift all our spirits, as we journey together through this Pentecost season, and encourage us, as we live out our lives as Christians, committed to lives of service, in God's Kingdom!

*Let us pray.*

*Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.*

*Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

The reading from Galatians, at first glance looks to have little, or nothing, in common with the Gospel reading from Luke.

But, maybe it does?

This passage from the letter of St Paul's to the Galatians, is possibly one of the most quoted, most loved passages from all his letters.

You could say, it is Paul at his theologically most radical!

It is Paul seeking to make sure that he hammers home the message that 'in Christ' there is no room for hatred based on any aspect of our humanity.

It is St Paul saying that as long as *we are focused on Christ, through faith*, there is room for plurality of ideas, so long as they conform to the standards demanded by *grace and mercy*.

It is Paul saying that it is not legitimate to impose our thoughts, sub doctrines, ideology and preferences on others.

We must remember that Paul writes as a Jew, but he writes for the Gentiles.

Paul lived in a world where the law, and all those little micro details wrapped up in the law, counted for everything.

In Paul's world there was little room for diversity and inclusivity, even hospitality.

Who you were and how you behaved counted for everything and, especially your salvation.

If you were deemed through the law to be an outsider in this world your lot would continue into the next.

And yet, Paul stresses that *faith* and *not the law* is the universal route to salvation.

Paul, it should be noted, is not suggesting that faith means throwing away the law, and collapsing into the worst excesses of moral relativism, but he is saying that faith and its implications come first.

It is our faith that unites us with Christ and allows us, that is the Body of Christ, to be a blessing in and for humanity; to be a blessing to and for the environment we live in, both *yours and mine*.

Faith, for Paul, changes everything. Without faith, all we are left with is a technique, a long and impossible list of does but more importantly don'ts.

*And that's the connection to our Gospel passage.*

Without faith could we be like the demonic called Legion? Most probably at some stage of life feeling like, I have been overrun. I am divided and separated. I am fragmented and fractured. I am disrupted. I am overwhelmed. My life is broken into many, many pieces."

Sound familiar? Ever felt like that? *trapped!*

The Demonic, was most likely a gentile, who the religious community deemed to be the ultimate outsider, *shows us that no one, no one at all, stands outside of God's radical hospitality and grace. He, a gentile, recognises who Jesus is!!!*

Faith changes our very conception of God; *'therefore now faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian.'* Grace and mercy now become the watchwords. Through faith we receive God's grace and His mercy. *That, is the good news!! That is the Gospel!*

It is the good news that set the demonic free. For the demonic, in stark contrast to the religious elite, with their insistence on the law and human rankings, recognised that Jesus is the 'Son of the Most High God.' Belief in Jesus sets us free; all of us, without exception.

But free to what end?

*Free, again like the formerly demon possessed man, to proclaim the gospel, to 'declare how much God has done,' to be a blessing to all. Free to fulfil our true calling in life!*

Faith, and faith alone, is our entry ticket into the communion of saints, God's holy family.

You, and I, are members of God's family simply because we are believers, because we have faith. Faith, it seems goes hand in glove with inclusivity and acceptance. Faith and faith alone bring us back to the hospitality of God. And such radical hospitality is open to all, irrespective of human and temporal identity markers.

*'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*

*And, if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.'*

The problem is that so often the world, and the religious world in particular, doesn't want to believe this, preferring tribal identities leading to schisms, not unity!

We sometimes prefer the niceties of everyday life of the law to faith, the consequence of which is mercy, grace, inclusivity and the radical hospitality of God, first made available through us in the here and now. That is our calling as people of faith.

Legalistic thinking can be far easier to deal with, offering fixed points of artificial certainty whereas the consequences of faith grace, mercy, inclusion, hospitality are ever fluid, ever progressive, ever challenging and, ever disquieting.

Faith cannot leave us securely in one place, instead it leads us on, eroding all certainties, *save one.*

*Faith gives us is the one great certainty; Jesus.* And, we know that Jesus disbarred no-one from his love, mercy and grace. The story of the demonic tells us so.

As people of faith we need to ask ourselves what it means to celebrate – not merely accommodate or tolerate - diversity and, to exercise radical hospitality. St. Paul was writing to a highly polarised community in Galatia. He was keen to stress that *Jews, Greeks, male, female, slave and free were all to be afforded the hospitality of God.*

Paul was addressing the big issues of his day, for in his world Gentiles, females and slaves were all regarded as second, even third, class citizens.

Paul's basic point is simply this: before God there is no such thing as a second, or even third, class citizen. *Each and every one of us is first class: 'in Christ there is no other class!'*

So our challenge, is to identify those groups who some, mistakenly and catastrophically, deem to be outside the hospitality of God, and then to challenge ourselves: 'are we still acting as disciplinarians, asking people to live under the force of manmade and depersonalising laws?'

For our role, calling and vocation, as people of faith is to be agents of grace, mercy and the radical hospitality of God, extending his love and blessing to all, for that is what it means to live as a person of faith.

That is what it means to be the Church.