### “Become All Things” Steve Finlan for The First Church, February 4, 2024

**1 Corinthians 9:19–23**

19 For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. 20To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. 21To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law) so that I might win those outside the law. 22To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I might by any means save some. 23I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

**Mark 1:29–34**

29As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30Now Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. 31He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

32 That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. 33And the whole city was gathered around the door. 34And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

How do you fit in to the social groups in which you find yourself? We all have strategies or maybe just habits, for fitting in. The apostles, both the original twelve and the new apostles that appeared soon after, like Paul, came from a variety of different backgrounds and had different skills, but they all had social skills.

Here we read about Paul consciously molding himself to appeal to different groups, so that he might get through to them with a message. He can echo the thinking of the Gentiles, their idea of being free and self-controlled, not subject to a law. He can also synch with the beliefs and practices of his fellow Jews, their reverence for the Torah, for holy days, and for stories from the tradition. He could fit in well with either group, and then he would put in a word about the Messiah Jesus who brought a new way of living, the way of faith and trust, guided by the new Spirit that Jesus sent.

And when he was in a mixed group, he had a way of talking about the collapsing of the barrier between Gentiles and Jews, and the coming of the new way of faith, available to Jew and Gentile equally. He can “become all things to all people, so that I might by any means save some” (1 Cor 9:22). He is putting the needs of others above his own. The previous chapter had shown where it made sense to defer to one’s friends, as regards what to eat and what to avoid. A number of believers had food restrictions. Paul says the food is not important; the relationships are. He says don’t “wound their conscience when it is weak” (1 Cor 8:12). He doesn’t want to lose people. “If food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall” (8:13).

It’s not that he has no beliefs of his own, it’s just that he’s going to be very aware of the danger of offending a potential convert or a new convert, and will do everything he can to maintain open lines of respectful communication.

Jesus also had good social skills and showed a high degree of consideration for others. In our story, he comes to Simon’s Peter’s house because Simon’s mother-in-law is sick. Moved by compassion, Jesus takes her by the hand and she is healed (Mark 1:31). Then he ministers to the whole town. Word has spread, and everybody for miles around brings their sick and afflicted. He cures many, and casts out demons.

What about *us*? I think the compassionate healing action of Jesus will effect each one of us individually, in the next life *and* in this one, even if we don’t experience the miraculous healing that many people did, in his presence during his earth life. The *stories* of his healings and his ministry effect us right now.

Now I want to combine some of what Paul said with the gospel. Paul drew close to Gentiles and Jews, and to the “weak,” in order to be able to offer them something that would change their lives. Can you imagine Jesus coming alongside you, becoming close to you and even *like* you, in order to uplift your vision toward the heavenly heights? Can you imagine him drawing close to you to show you that he understands your life, and then offering something that will enhance that life in an amazing way? How might Jesus show friendship toward *you*? Would he talk to you about the music you like, or the stories you like? Would he listen to your story, if you felt moved to tell it? I think you would be moved to open up to him. You would feel honored and respected, after spending some time with him. Jesus finds each one of us *interesting*.

Kariana Reyes has written about her experience. She used to be impatient when she read novels. She’d get about a quarter of the way through and then jump to the end, impatient to find out how things ended up. When she got saved, she found herself doing the same thing, wanting to jump ahead and find out what the future held for her. Would she get married? Would she have children? She has had to learn that every chapter in her personal story is important. God is teaching her patience. Jesus is the author and finisher of her faith (Heb 12:2). She has stopped fearing what might lie ahead, and is just living her life. She says “all of the in-between chapters of waiting developed me and deepened my love and reliance for God, my Author.” ([God Wrote Every Chapter in Your Story | Desiring God](https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-wrote-every-chapter-in-your-story))

So my exhortation to you today is to think about drawing close to Jesus, knowing that he has already drawn close to *you*. Share your hurts and your hopes, your aspirations, your worries, and your memories with him. As it says in Revelation, “Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you” (Rev 3:20). This shows him as an intimate friend. He will always draw close, so that he may save some.

I ask you today: *let him in*. Let him share in *your* life. Let him guide your story. Let him lift up and polish your story. Let him show you that each chapter in your story is important.