

Sermon Proper 7 2019

June 23, 2019

Gal 3:23-:4:7

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read.

This last week I was watching a documentary on the history of the internet, and while I was watching one story in particular struck me. It was the story of a family who had a loved one killed in a car accident. The father described how the police had only told him of some injury the daughter had experienced to her face, but that her thumb had been severely mangled. As if that wasn't hard enough, though, he then said things got most difficult when people found pictures of the accident showing her to have been quite disfigured and posted them on the internet, with some internet users even emailing the dad with these pictures and taunting him with them. As horrendously terrible as this is, what struck me the most as a pastor wasn't the disgusting display from these people, it was the response of the mother. She said she couldn't believe that people could be so depraved.

Now it may sound odd that I would be struck by that, after all, this is such a horrible display of depravity. It truly is. That people would taunt someone with the pictures of their disfigured deceased loved one is truly awful, truly depraved. However, the reality is that this is just what we should expect. It's something that should never surprise us. It shouldn't surprise us when it's anonymous internet users. It shouldn't surprise us when it's corrupt politicians fixing elections and taking foreign aid from their starving people. It shouldn't surprise us when it's the clergy in the Catholic Church sexually abusing children. And most of all it shouldn't surprise us when we find that depravity in the selfishness of our own hearts.

Now that's not to say it shouldn't sadden us. It should. It should break our hearts when we see manifestation of just how evil we are, but it shouldn't surprise us. Why? Because that's what Scripture is describing when it describes our sinfulness. In particular, as we're looking at Paul's words in the letter to the Galatians this morning, we see that he is describing it there too. **In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.**

When we were children, we were enslaved to the elementary principles of this world. We were enslaved to the depravity of it. We served that depravity of sin, of death, of the devil. We were followers of these ways of evil.

Of course as I say this, we have to acknowledge something. Is that what we generally observe? When we look out our windows in Western Springs, is that what we see? When we see our idyllic houses with manicured lawns, or as we go to our children's baseball and soccer games? Sure we might see tempers flare here and there, and parents who get unruly on occasion, but is the first thing that comes to mind the depravity of man? Probably not for you, and I know not for me. You see, the reality is that even though I'm not shocked when I hear a story about how depraved we are, it's not as though I spend all my time checking it off my list: "oh, so and so just commented about this, they're so depraved. Oh, such and such just did that, they're so depraved." No, it doesn't work like that. Sure, when I hear examples of such depravity I note them and that they prove the point of Scripture, but it's not like I obsess about this all the time. And so we could ask why is that, couldn't we? Why don't see this in every circumstance and every place?

Well a part of it is that it is so common, we're blind to it. We just don't realize how wicked we really are. And as Lutherans, we actually say that's God's mercy to us to a degree, because if we got it, we'd break down in despair. But the other part of it is what Paul also said, "**before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.**" Before Jesus came, and before Jesus enters the heart of a man by faith, the rule of that man is the Law. You see God has written that Law into creation. And because of that, even as broken and sinful as we are as people, we still have the perception to grasp that. And because of that we like the Law. We like order, we like good works.

I was reading our book for the book reading that we'll be discussing this week, "Has American Christianity Failed?" and those of you reading might have gotten to the part where Pastor Wolfmüller makes the point that if you ask someone on the street if they think they're going to heaven, they'll often say yes. And if you ask why, their response will be that they are a good person. Now, Pastor Wolfmüller brings this up to make the point that we operate according to the Law naturally, and because of that we think we earn heaven. And that fits well here. But it also shows that we get the Law to some extent naturally. We get that we're supposed to be good people.

In fact, as he does so, we can connect this to the fall into sin. When Adam and Eve realize their sin, what do they do? They see their nakedness and they clothe themselves with fig leaves. Why? They think the Law is the solution. They think that they have to earn their way out of their sin. They think they have to show God that they've made up for what they've done. And that's what our default is.

In fact, I often say that as we are creating the environment in our culture that is so devoid of a morality consistent with God's commands two observations are worth noting. First, I think the mean will have to regress to something closer to God's revealed commands, and what will that mean? Well, it means that we'll likely in our assumption that Law is the solution return to something more consistent with the Ten Commandments. However, I think that will come with a lot of conversions to Islam. You see Islam is all about Law. If you want to feel justified by the Law, it's a great place to be. So, that's the first thing, is that we're creating a vacuum that will be filled. The second observation is that we look how it might be immoral with regard to God's commands, but it certainly doesn't lack moralism. It doesn't lack legalism. Think about it. In our culture if you don't use the right words, or express the right thoughts you are brow beaten and judged. We think that Law will save us.

You see, as we are so depraved in our sin, it's our nature in this depravity to think that the Law is the solution. In fact, as I speak about our culture being moralistic in its own right, I was just telling some friends last week about how I look at so many friends that I had in my time in Navigators—the non-denominational group I was a part of in college that was my bridge from Roman Catholicism to Lutheranism—about how I look at so many friends there who were stalwarts in that and how they've changed so much. How so? Well, then they were of the mindset that is common in American Christianity: we know the Gospel, let's get on with the Christian Life. And in my experience, there were many good things that I learned: disciplines in prayer and Bible Study, a wonderful discipline in Scripture Memory in particular. But there was a bit of an attitude that if you didn't exercise those disciplines just so then you might not be Christian. And what I've seen with a number of the stalwarts there is that when they left that bubble in Navigators, they realized this legalism was restrictive. So, they rightly sought freedom from that, but they sought it in mainstream liberal Christianity. But it's so interesting because what they think is the freedom of this Christianity and that we see in our culture is not freedom at all, it's this moralism that I just mentioned. They show that we have this assumption that Law will save us.

And again, in our depravity, this is what we think. We think that this law is the solution for us. But it's not. It's just the guardian, the "pedagogue" in the Greek. And as I say that, many of you have probably heard that word pedagogue, and we think of that in relation to education, as we should. Pedagogues were ones responsible for education, but they were only in place as Paul says, like guardians. Once someone reached a certain age that was relieved.

And that relief from the enslavement to sin, the relief from the bondage of Law is found in Jesus. **So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.** Just as we'd like to come before God clothed with these fig leaves of our works, we see in baptism that He has clothed us with His righteousness. In fact, I know I've made this point before, but do you remember what happens with Adam and Eve's clothing in Genesis Three? God sees them with these fig leaves and what does He do? Does He make them walk around in them? No, He kills an animal and gives them the skin. The first death in the Bible is at God's hand. Here Adam and Eve should die, here they wanted to justify themselves so they wouldn't have to die, and God says "No." No your sacrifice isn't good enough. No you can't do enough. No, I'll do it for you and it will be better.

Christian know this for yourself. Your goodness isn't good enough, your depravity is too much, and our Lord has better for you. He has the justification of the cross. He gives you faith. He gives you Jesus: the One sacrificed in your place. **When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.** Now I don't want to go down a whole other rabbit hole about sons and slaves, those of you reading the book will get a good rundown on that. But hear that blessing there, you were enslaved to sin, this world is enslaved under sin. The Law is given as a guardian, as we could say even a temper to the enslavement, and as a means to see just how enslaved we are because we can't do it. But Jesus came as the One who can. And He has won that for you on the cross. And tell you neighbors He has won that for them on the cross. Tell them about their freedom won by Jesus.

If you need use the example of our Gospel Lesson this weekend to understand and confess. Look at that. There's this man oppressed by a legion of demons. So enslaved to them he lives in the graveyard. And then Jesus in His power brings freedom. And this man wants to follow Him, and what does Jesus say: **"Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.' And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him."**

This is what He has done for you and for the world. Yes, we are enslaved in sin, and we think the law is the solution to it. But God has given us His Son as the real solution, and it is the solution worth proclaiming to the whole world. Amen.