

“Led by the Spirit”
Psalm 16; Galatians 5:1, 13-25
West End Presbyterian Church
3rd Sunday after Pentecost
6.26.22

Psalm 16 (NRSV)

A Miktam of David.

1 Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

2 I say to the Lord, “You are my Lord;

I have no good apart from you.”

3 As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble ones

in whom is all my delight.

4 Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows;

their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out

or take their names upon my lips.

5 The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup;

you hold my lot.

6 The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;

I have a goodly heritage.

7 I bless the Lord, who gives me counsel;

in the night also my heart instructs me.

8 I keep the Lord always before me;

because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;

my body also rests secure.

10 For you do not give me up to Sheol

or let your faithful one see the Pit.

11 You show me the path of life.

In your presence there is fullness of joy;

in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

The Word of God for the People of God. **Thanks be to God!**

Galatians 5:1, 13-25 (NRSV)

1 For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

13 For you were called to freedom, my siblings; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another.

14 For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

15 If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

16 Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh.

17 For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want.

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law.

19 Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness,

20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions,

21 envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,

23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

The Word of God for the People of God! **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Paul is angry and it's apparent in this letter to the Galatians. Why is Paul angry with the Church in Galatia?

Well, maybe we can imagine it happening like this. He's most likely in Macedonia or Achaia, about 500-700 miles from Galatia. And

the man is working hard! The Spirit is moving in him to continue his ministry to get the churches going in that area. He's probably stressed enough as it is and trying to be as methodical as possible in his dealings with the churches. He's deep in prayer. Maybe he's trying to write a sermon. Who knows.

But, the shoe drops. Some people arrive to bring Paul some bad news. Bad news about the Galatian Church. The same church Paul has worked tirelessly, through the Spirit's guidance, to get it off the ground. And yet, these people who are concerned with the Galatian Church say something that would send chills down anyone's spine. "Paul, your work is being undermined."

You see, some persuasive traveling "evangelists" have come to Galatia. They seem to believe they have a better gospel than what Paul has preached. These evangelists preach that people must

follow the Law faithfully in order to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ. Twisting the Law and twisting the Gospel.

Of course, these messengers are probably saying to the Apostle: “We realize that you do not adhere to that, Paul, nor do you preach it. For you preach that it is only Christ who fulfilled the Law and we are freed to live out the Spirit *of* the Law to love God, neighbor, and self. Good sir, we get it and we agree wholeheartedly with you. However, this traveling group of evangelists have persuaded so many people in the church that we are no longer one. Division has been sown. All we do is argue. And your work has been sabotaged. These evangelists are slandering you, attacking us, and persuading other people to terminate the work that has been done! Paul! Please get to Galatia ASAP!”

That's why Paul is angry. After all, he just came from Galatia! So, he writes a letter. And it's pointed and he isn't wasting time! He's calling out this band of fake preachers.

After a quick greeting, Paul is astonished at the opening of the letter that so many people have deserted him and ultimately, Christ. Paul is calling out this problematic group of traveling preachers, even saying they should be placed under a curse!

He goes on in this letter. Paul reminds the listeners and readers of this pointed letter of his past. How he persecuted followers of Jesus before his Damascus experience. It was there on that Road to Damascus, Paul declares, that God's grace was shown to him by revealing Jesus Christ. Then, Paul becomes an integral figure in the early life of the Church.

The people in the Galatian church are divided! They are tearing each other apart. They are divided, among other things, about whether or not one is to be circumcised before becoming a Christian.

However, another issue dividing the people is whether or not they have the license to commit the sin without facing the consequences. The Apostle Paul warns the Galatians to not use their freedom in Christ as opportunities for self-indulgence.

Instead, use their freedom in Christ to serve their neighbors. Yet, the works of the flesh were apparent in this ancient congregation.

Understandably, there were plenty of Christians who were tempted by and fell into the ways of Rome since Rome ruled Galatia. Rome was all around them. Still, plenty of Galatian Christians were using their freedom in Christ as an excuse to commit all the sin they wanted, thinking that they would be automatically forgiven.

Twentieth century theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, calls this “cheap grace”.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German minister and theologian who, among others, resisted Hitler and the Third Reich. During Hitler’s rise to power, the Nazis infiltrated the congregations in Germany. Nazi lies replaced the truth of the Living Word. Nazi’s obsession with genocide replaced the greatest commandment given to us: Love God and love your neighbors as yourself. Hitler replaced the Savior. The empty cross that our LORD and Savior, Jesus Christ, was crucified upon which represents the Good News of God’s love for a broken world was replaced by a twisted cross that claimed white supremacy, a heresy we are seeing play out here in the United States and across Europe again.

In 1934, about a year after Hitler came to power, a group of people, including Dietrich Bonhoeffer, gathered together in Barmen and created a document called “The Theological Declaration of Barmen”. We will use a portion of it as our Affirmation of Faith today.

“The Theological Declaration of Barmen” was written as a response to the chokehold the Nazis had on the churches. “German Christians” saw no problem with Hitler. He promised security in the aftermath of World War 1 and an economic crisis. The Good News of God’s liberating love made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ was replaced by the garbage of white Christian nationalism and militarism. For these blind followers of Nazi propaganda, being patriotic was equal to Christian truth. Adolf Hitler and his desire for Aryans to rule the world was seen as God’s divine will.

The Nazis preached that Jesus was not LORD in every area of life and, therefore, one could do what they wanted and not face consequences (again, what Bonhoeffer coined “cheap grace”). The group of theologians, local ministers, and professors responded by saying that we, the Church, are made free in Christ Jesus. It is in Christ and in Christ alone we serve who also holds an absolute claim on our entire lives.

Paul had the band of fake preachers to deal with. The authors of the Declaration of Barmen also had their fake preachers to deal with.

Ninety years ago, many rallied around “The Theological Declaration of Barmen” and, thankfully, we as members of the Presbyterian Church (USA) recognize it as one of the twelve documents in the *Book of Confessions*, the first part of our denomination’s

constitution. Unfortunately, we all know how things played out in the 1930s. The Nazis continued to consolidate their power and they were able to commit genocide to various groups of people including Jews, political opponents, differently abled, Roma, intellectuals, as well as gays and lesbians.

The Barmen Declaration is four pages long and divided in two parts: An appeal to the Christians living in Germany and the declaration itself. In the declaration, there are six statements that include scriptures. The Affirmation of Faith we will proclaim together from this declaration is the second statement. It points to freedom in Christ.

Freedom in Christ, the authors of the Barmen Declaration say, does not mean we have a license to do what we want. Freedom in Christ is expensive, even though it is free. Freedom in Christ does

not mean we keep people away from experiencing the Good News of God's love for a hurting world simply because they look or act differently than the rest of us. Freedom in Christ does not mean ultimate loyalty to the state. Freedom in Christ does not mean Christian nationalism nor does it mean to be racially pure. Yet, people in 2022 who act in the same way Hitler and his cronies did ninety years ago, claim they are acting in Christ's name. The fruits of their spirit are not love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. Instead, their fruits are hate, fear, greed, bigotry, and annihilation. And these rotten fruits many have consumed thinking it will satisfy their desires turn out to devour them.

But, the Holy Spirit is at work in our world. The Spirit is the same one who led the group of theologians, ministers, church members, and professors to call out evil. The Holy Spirit led these people

ninety years ago and is leading people today who struggle for love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control in our world being consumed by the forces of evil.

It takes courage to stand up to evil, even when we feel alone. It takes courage to push back on hate, even when it's so easy to become the target of a conspiracy theory and your name is plastered around social media so people can harm you. It takes courage to share and show love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control when it is easy to do otherwise. But, we don't go at it alone. The presence of the Holy Spirit overwhelms us and gives us the strength to keep going, even when it seems hopeless. And also remember this, the freedom we have in Christ is free, but it is costly. As Christ did for the least of these in his ministry, we are called to do the same.

Beloved in Christ, trust this Good News.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.