

June 17, 2007

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ his son our Lord, amen.

I want to talk about something very simple but as often happens the very simple things turn out to be hard to understand and in this case very hard to believe. The message for today is from Paul's letter to the Galatians, however the introduction may be found in the Gospel lesson from last week. Remember last week we read about how Jesus raised from the dead the only son of this widow. That is a wonderful miracle. It speaks to Jesus' power and love.

Unfortunately, a question arises. When we recall stories of Jesus healing or in this case Jesus raising the man from the dead the question is asked. What about the others, what about those who were not healed, those who were not raised from the dead. Even today many people ask why are some people healed and others are not. We hear stories of people with cancer for example, inoperable cancer. Cancer so bad they don't even want to do chemo or radiation. We hear how people pray for them and the cancer disappears. The doctor says it was here it's gone I don't know how it happened. We say, Praise be to God.

What about the others that aren't healed? What about the other people with inoperable cancer who aren't healed whose cancer isn't taken away? There doesn't seem to be any recognizable reason why some are healed and some are not.

Why do sometimes the good suffer and the wicked prosper? Why, do the Twins lose and the Yankees, win?

We get into questions of God's love, power and justice. God doesn't seem to always exhibit love, use his power or care about justice. At least it doesn't seem so to us.

I have been listening to a series on the history of philosophy. It is interesting but I have to tell you I'm getting so confused. My head hurts. Just keeping up with the vocabulary is difficult. Comedian Steve Martin said that in college they teach you enough philosophy to mess you up for the rest of your life.

One of the interesting things the professor talked about is epistemology, the study of knowledge. He talked about the different methods that are used to understand knowledge or used to prove concepts. As every scientist knows the method you use to study will have a direct impact on your findings or results. That's why we are skeptical of statistics.

They take a poll and prove such and such. But what questions did they ask? How did they ask the questions? Numbers don't lie but people can arrange them to say what they want them to say.

So for example when Jesus heals one person and not another person we say this isn't right, this isn't fair. Jesus must either not love everybody or like Rabbi Kushner the author of why Bad things happen to good people, Kushner suggests that God really wants to help but doesn't have the power to do it. I'm glad I don't believe in that god.

Why does Jesus help one person and not another? The answer may be hard to see because we are looking in the wrong place, looking from the wrong perspective. We are trying to understand from a human perspective, a human understanding of love and justice and power.

The fact is, God is God. It is God's ball, God's world and God gets to set the rules. This is of course offensive to us because we want God to do the things we want God to do. We want God to do things that are fair and loving and just. We also want to be able to decide or at least understand what is fair and loving and just. When God doesn't act in the way we judge is fair and loving and just we think there is something wrong with God.

In order to live in this world in community we have to understand the rules. As Christians we want to live as Christ wants us to live. We strive to understand God's will and God's ways. That is the way we strive to live. But we need to remember that, God is God. God doesn't have to live according to our understanding of what is right and wrong and fair. Whatever God does, by definition is good. It may or may not be good in our eyes or in our understanding but God makes the rules.

The point is that God is God, we are not. This is one of the examples of how being a Christian is a very humbling existence. We probably don't like it because we don't want to give up that much control.

This leads us to Paul's letter to the Galatians. The theme is the same, humility because God is God.

We are not justified by works of the law. We are not made right in God's eyes by the things we do or the things we don't do. Even if we could follow the Ten Commandments perfectly, if we could follow every one of them, it wouldn't make us right in God's eyes. We might get a plague because we would be the first one. By it wouldn't make us right in God's eyes. There isn't anything we can do that would make us right in God's eyes.

Because only Jesus makes us right in God's eyes. This is not an easy thing to believe or accept. We don't like the fact that Jesus does it all and asks us to have just have faith, just trust, in the fact that he has done it all.

***You have me over for dinner. I then have you over for dinner. We are square, we are even. You owe me nothing, I owe you nothing.***

*You go out to eat with someone. You say this is on me. No, they say, we'll split it. No I want to do this. Well at least let me pay the tip. No, thank you anyway but I want to do this for you.*

God sent Jesus to die on our behalf. Jesus' death and resurrection did it all, forgave our sins, reconciled us to God, gave us the hope of eternal life. There is a part of us that wants to say to God, how about if we split it? You do this and I'll do that. However Jesus already died on the cross.

There is a part of us that says, how about if I pick up the tip? The problem is God wants to do it all. God wants to get all the credit. God wants total control. That's a problem because we want control at least some control. Isn't there something I can do? It is so hard to trust God.

I was on my college swim team and one Christmas vacation we went with the team to Barbados. Yea, those college days are tough. Well some of us were 21 and old enough to rent these jeeps. They don't know anything about cars over there, they had the steering wheel on the wrong side of the car.

One time my friend Peggy was driving and we were going through this winding road and I guess I didn't fully trust her driving this jeep because when we went around this one turn I grabbed the steering wheel.

This is not a good thing. Peggy was an excellent driver I just wasn't a good truster. I didn't trust her. I should have but I wanted to be in control. I didn't want to give up control to Peggy.

Paul tells us the good news. Jesus died for your sins. Jesus died to repair your relationship with God. Jesus makes you right in God's eyes. The tough part is that he wants us to believe him. Believe that he's got it all covered. He wants us to trust him. He wants us to stand firm on that rock. Trust in the Lord with all of your heart, lean not on your own understanding, lean not on your own strength, lean not on your own goodness.

Believe and trust Jesus it's the only way, the only way to be free.  
Amen.