

May 28, 2017 – (Easter 7, Luk)

Sermon Text – Ephesians 3:1-9, 23-29

- But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 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. -

Baptisms – We’ve had a lot of them lately, so many that I haven’t been focusing on them in my preaching; but here, Paul gets to the heart of the matter in his Letter to the Galatians. He writes, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” This got me to thinking about how we do baptisms. We give the newly baptized many gifts – a quilt, a rose, a medallion and a candle – but we don’t give them a robe, to which Paul is here referring. I suppose, for our practice, we could paraphrase, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have been covered over with a quilters’ quilt.” Yesterday, our newest grandson, Garrett, was baptized in Kimball, along with his cousin, Grayson. They both received a robe like this one, symbolizing that they have each been “clothed...with Christ.” Now, there are a lot of differences between Garrett and Grayson. They have different parents, different sponsors, different grandparents (at least on one side of each family), different birth dates, different weights and different hair lengths. But, they now have at least one thing in common. They have both been baptized. They have both been “clothed... with Christ.” They are both one in baptism.

In writing to the Galatians, Paul then goes on to spell out the significance of this very important point about baptisms. He writes, “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.” There is no distinction... not by nationality... not by social standing... and not by biology. Everyone is equal in the eyes of God. Everyone is the same when measured by God’s standards. Everyone is on a par with everyone else when seen from God’s perspective. Because what God sees is that we are all God’s children by faith. We are all clothed with the righteousness of Christ through baptism. And we are all heirs to God’s promise by the covenant God made first with Abraham. Listen to it again, “There is no longer Jew or Greek... slave or free... male and female...” He could easily have continued. “There is no black or white, brown or yellow, red or green, blue or purple.” And those colors can be indications of a whole

number of differences. They can stand for the color of your skin, or the colors of your flag, or the colors of your sports teams, or the colors of your colleges, or your high schools, or your community organizations – whatever it is that you use to draw distinctions between yourself and others. In light of baptism, none of those things make any difference. “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

One of the things we need to know about Paul is that he was a man of his time. He had been educated as a Jew. He grew up zealous for the requirements of his faith. And little, Jewish boys were taught to pray every morning, “God, I give you thanks, that I was born a Jew and not a gentile, free and not a slave, male and not a female.” That was his mindset. It was indoctrinated into him from the time he was small. And here, in our text for today, Paul wipes all of that prejudicial thinking. “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 in that one sentence, all of Paul’s boyhood prayers, all of his childlike prejudice, all of his preconceived notions about the way of the world and the favoritism of God are eliminated, done away with, set aside because of his new-found faith in the person of Jesus Christ. He has learned a new prayer, a new phrase, a new understanding by which to live his life. I can imagine him praying, “God, I thank you, that in Christ there are no distinctions, for all are one in Christ Jesus.”

Of course, Paul wasn’t always consistent. He seems to have felt the pressures of his society. He knew that not everything could possibly change in just one instance. Instead, when push came to shove, he found himself backing down from the most radical implications of his conclusions about the gospel. When women began to cause a disturbance in the Corinthian congregation, speaking out during worship and disrupting the peace and the orderliness of the service, he told them that “women should be silent in the churches...for God is a God not of disorder but of peace.” Still, how many wonderful women don’t we have today who are fabulous preachers and tremendous theologians in our church? That was simply an implication that had to wait until the world was ready for it. Today, we can rejoice that the old prejudice has been overcome. And when there was a problem between slaves and masters, Paul did not counsel that slavery should be abolished. He advised that slaves should be the best slaves that they could be, that masters should treat their slaves lovingly and fairly; and, that both should treat one another as members of the same family, as brothers and sisters, who are all children of God. The abolition of slavery would have to wait

hundreds of years, until our own Civil War finally put an end to it in this country. And yet, slavery persists even to this day and statistics tell us that there are more slaves in the world today than there have ever been in any other time of history. Things change slowly. The world is not always ready to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. It was only the distinction between Jew and Greek, for which Paul was really willing to go to bat. On that there could be no compromise. This, for Paul, was the heart of the gospel. The law was no longer valid as the measure of God's people. It had served its purpose. Now, it had been replaced by faith, which had been the basis of God's relationship with God's people even from the very beginning. For he concludes his argument, "if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise." And that is the whole point. Yes, there are differences. But those differences no longer separate us. For we have all been baptized and we are all one in Christ.

Amen.