HOMILY FOR WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3RD, 2026 – GALATIANS 2: 11 - 21

Like so many of the passages the Lectionary appoints for reading during worship, our passage from Galatians this evening truly requires a good deal of context setting. Let us start with timelines. It is generally accepted that Jesus was crucified no earlier than the year 30 of the common era and not later than the spring of 33. Paul is believed to have had his road to Damascus experience between 33 and 36. There are two dominant opinions of the date Paul wrote to the Galatians. One is between 48 and 49; others believe it would have been between 53 and 55. Those who take the earlier view do so because it makes no mention of the Council of Jerusalem which met in 49 and 50 to address the question whether Gentiles needed to become Jews before they could become followers of Jesus. Or were they accepted by the Grace of God and through Christ's sacrifice as the Gentiles they were.

You may remember that sometime early in 2025 we had a lesson from Acts 10 at this service which told of Peter having a vision of all manner of creatures known as unclean and he hears a voice telling him to rise and eat. At his protest the voice returns, *What God has made unclean, you must not call profane.* Peter goes on to preach to the Gentiles and at the end of the 10th chapter the Holy Spirit descends upon both Jews and Gentiles. The Council very much influenced by Peter and James took the position that Gentiles need not become Jews which principally but not exclusively meant that Gentile men did not have to become circumcised. The council wrote as follows as quoted in Acts 15: *For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell."*

Those who believe it was written at a later time take the opinion that the Council's decision did not end the struggle and those who took the position that Gentiles needed to become Jews known as the Judaizers were still active, particularly among the Pharisees.

The decision of the Council was revolutionary beyond imagining. For well over a millennium, Jews had regarded themselves a people set apart by God. The decision of the Council opened the nascent church to become a home for all and potentially a world-wide religion. Do not forget that at the time of the Council, the followers of Jesus remained a sect within Temple Judaism.

The struggle in our passage this evening between Paul and Cephas a.k.a Peter: Paul is absolutely adamant that fulfilling the law was not enough. *Yet know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in[a] Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.* Peter tried to stay in a middle view. We have plenty of accounts of tensions between Peter and Paul even as their lives were coming to end in Rome – Paul beheaded because of

his status as a Roman citizen entitled him to a more humane execution. Peter crucified upside down because he said he was unworthy to meet death in the same manner as his Saviour.

Everything was irrevocably changed in the year 70 when after 4 years of rebellion in Palestine, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem including the Temple, the site of the Holy of Holies believed to be the earthly home of God. The Romans also massacred the entire priestly class attached to the Temple Until that point Judaism was significantly focused on Temple worship. Perhaps a modern analogy might be the way followers of Islam are enjoined to make the Haj a pilgrimage to Mecca and the Kaaba at least once in their lives. Imagine the global turmoil if Mecca and the Kaaba were to be destroyed. Judaism faced a real possibility of disappearing.

Judaism was rescued by the Pharisees and became focused on the Synagogue. But the Pharisees were rigid and detailed in enforcing the Law of Moses, so it is hardly remarkable that the Pharisees were Judaizers. It is equally unremarkable that they couldn't see Jesus as their long-expected Messiah. Few of the expectations of the Messiah had occurred. In Daniel 7: 13 – 14*, As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.* Not very congruent with the conditions in mid-first century Palestine. in the year 88 the followers of Jesus were banished from synagogues. The Christian Church was hitherto entirely separate from Jewish worship. And tragically it was not long that in some Christian circles the Jews were referred to as "Christ killers". In Mark, the earliest of the Gospels, the priests and the elders together with Pontius Pilate were declared responsible for Jesus' death. In Matthew, the most Jewish of the Gospels, it says in Chapter 27 *So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." Then the people as a whole answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" So he released Barabbas for them, and after flogging Jesus he handed him over to be crucified.* It is clear that Matthew was written well after the destruction of the temple and in the midst of tensions between Synagogue Judaism and the followers of Jesus. It might even have been written after the banishment from the Synagogue.

Especially after Christianity became the state religion of Rome in 380, Christian persecution of Jews became near constant. The first major massacres of Jews by Christian armies occurred in the Rhine Valley as armies assembled for the first crusade in 1097. There were many smaller persecutions before that. Discrimination, banishment, and massacres continued throughout the centuries until our own, altogether too much of it at the behest of various wings of the church.

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In the 20th century a significant number of theologians developed a theology that fully affirms Trinitarian theology and the divinity of Jesus while holding that Jesus was a "proleptic" Messiah who became incarnate in the world of the Jews not to call Jews but to call Gentiles into covenant with the God of Israel. We have read many times of Jesus ministering on the other side, the Gentile side of the lake. It is a logical outcome of such theology that the Synagogue and the Church should be united in expectation of the coming of the Messiah, the first time for Jews, the second time for Christians.

Lastly, speaking of relations between Christians and Jews has become ever more fraught in this decade with the wars in Gaza, the West Bank, southern Lebanon, and Iran. I can say unequivocably that the Hamas attack on Israel in October 2022 was heinous. The Israeli Government's response has been orders of magnitude more heinous and dangerously carrying the possibility of self-destruction. It is a tragedy beyond all measure that the greatest victims of Fascism in the 20th century should have spawned a government that is becoming a perpetrator of Fascism in the 21st.

But remember, the Government of Israel is not Judaism. Remember the Government of Israel is not the world-wide Jewish people. Remember, the Government of Israel is opposed by a significant number of Jewish citizens of Israel. Antisemitism remains the deep evil it always has been. If we feel remotely tempted to self-righteousness, let us remember that our governments of so-called Christian countries committed countless atrocities over the centuries. On the very bulletin that you have for this service we acknowledge our need for reconciliation with the first peoples of this country whom our forbears treated abominably often in Jesus' name. Let us also remember the 937 Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany aboard the St. Louis in the summer of 1939. They were refused entry to Cuba and then to the United States. Their last hope was Canada. They were refused entry. They had to return to Europe. 254 of them died in in the death camps. And even when the war was over, a senior Canadian official when asked about admitting Jewish refugees coined the phrase, None is too many. Think of how many "good" Christians made those decisions.

Let us pray, Gracious God in our brokenness give us the strength to reach out to the brokenness of others at home and around the world and to work together to make division just difference, distance just a number, and denomination and creed just a reach, in our several ways, to you, Our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

Amen