

Sine Domino Frustra Laboramus

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
June 20 2010  
Glendale Lutheran Church

CLOTHED WITH CHRIST  
Galatians 3:23-29

I.

I hear every once in a while that Law / Gospel, sin / grace preaching is no longer adequate to meet the needs of today's society, that more and more, those who are looking for preaching that is contemporary, relevant to issues which we confront on a daily basis. On the last point, I couldn't agree more. But never at the expense of Law / Gospel, sin / grace. Those twin themes speak to the heart of every person's life and condition, no matter where we find ourselves. What if...what if week after week you heard five key ingredients on how to be a successful parent, or three main points on how to improve your marriage, or what you need to do to gain prosperity. But you never heard that you were a sinner to the core, unable to effect your own salvation; that you are reconciled to God only through Jesus Christ and his redeeming act of sacrificial love which culminated on the cross and was sealed in victory at the open tomb. What if...what if the preacher used the pulpit as a platform for social reform; what if the pages of Holy Scripture were hardly ever referenced. The pews might be filled, but the souls of those sitting there would be hungry and thirsty for the word of the Lord.

II.

That was the heart of Paul's letter to the Galatians. The very Gospel was at stake, the bold, radical news that Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord of the

world. The church was being duped into believing that the Law saves, that following a set of rules was sufficient to warrant God's favor. Paul began this letter with no superficial niceties; these are the very first verses: "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel, which is no gospel at all." Here he says, "Before faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith." The Law is a means to an end, and the end is saving faith in Christ Jesus. The analogy Paul uses here is found in the word he chose – pedagogue. In that world, a person, often a slave, was something between a tutor and a baby-sitter, who was put in charge of a child from age six to sixteen, to teach that child right and wrong, to protect that child from harm. "The Law," says one commentary, "is the basis of human behavior during a period of immaturity, while humankind is growing up." In other words, a school teacher wouldn't tell a class of first graders that they can do anything they want whenever they want. We wouldn't give a sixteen-year-old the keys to the car without any restrictions or admonitions.

Now, says the apostle, from a spiritual perspective, we are not immature, we are spiritual adults, who are not under the bondage of the Law, but rather live in the freedom of the Gospel. It is the love of Christ for us that has reconciled us to a just, holy God. That's not to say that we no longer need God's Law in our lives – of course we do – and to know that its purpose remains to ready our hearts and minds to receive in faith the grace of Jesus Christ. Moreover, it is that love of Christ which constrains us, compels us, encompasses us, determines the decisions we make and the directions we take for our lives and lifestyles. On this Father's Day, it is akin to our parent

/ child relationships. I won't say 'always,' but I'd like to believe that I followed the rules of the house not because of the threat of punishment but because if I didn't I was disobeying and thus disappointing a mother and father whom I knew truly loved me.

### III.

“You are all sons (and daughters, of course) of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST HAVE CLOTHED YOURSELVES WITH CHRIST.” What does that mean, to be ‘clothed with Christ?’ In Colossians, chapter 3, Paul uses that same imagery, only with more specificity: “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, CLOTHE YOURSELVES with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.” He goes on, “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” That’s not for the feint-hearted, and it’s definitely not for the spiritually immature, and it’s even more definitely not possible apart from the prevailing love of Christ for us with which we are clothed.

### IV.

These next words of Paul are as disarming as they are embracing. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” He was not in the business of revolutionizing the social orders of that day, for that would have detracted from the message of the Gospel. Rather, he was telling the faithful, “You are bound together by no less than that very same Gospel. You are all clothed with the same Christ.” Do you realize how radical those words were – and still are! IN THE GOSPEL, there is neither Jew nor Greek. Good grief! The Greeks divided all men into

two classes, Greeks and barbarians; the Jews had placed in the temple's entrance to the Holy of Holies a sign that read, "Any Gentile who dares to enter here is responsible for his own death." IN THE GOSPEL, there is neither slave nor free. Good grief! Slaves then, as they ashamedly were in the first decades of our own country, were nothing more than property to be bought and sold. IN THE GOSPEL, there is neither male nor female. Good grief! A wife then was the property of her husband and her status ranked with slaves and children. IN THE GOSPEL, there is neither black nor white nor Hispanic nor Asian. IN THE GOSPEL, there is neither the "haves" nor the "have not's." IN THE GOSPEL, there is neither Protestant nor Roman Catholic. IN THE GOSPEL, there is no party spirit no politicking or lobbying or namecalling within the church or denomination.

You get the point. As long as the world endures, there will always be classes and categories of persons, socially, politically, economically, and sometimes prejudicially. But such divisions and distinctions may never enter these doors, where the Gospel is proclaimed and lived. You pick your own bias; not too many of us are without them. And picture that person sitting beside you here at worship or receiving the Lord's Supper. It just may be that such a person will be next to you in heaven, so you might as well get used to it...here on earth.

Again, you get the point. Here, the Gospel prevails. Here, the Gospel lives. Here, the Gospel determines our life together...the Gospel of grace. That's what it means – TO BE CLOTHED WITH CHRIST.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.