

**The Reverend Jon Hauerwas – October 6, 2019 – “One”
Genesis 12:1-3 and Galatians 3:6-9, 26-29**

In our first lesson this morning, God tells Abram that he has been set apart as the recipient of God’s blessing. On the surface, that sounds great. Who doesn’t want to be blessed by God? As Paul writes in Romans, “if God is for us, then who can be against us?” Here, Paul is reminding us that to align oneself with God is to be on the side of justice and mercy, forgiveness and love. And as the people of God, that’s exactly where we want to be.

But, curiously, controversy and enmity have a way of pursuing those who seek to live into the image of God. In every age, there have been prophets who served as the mouthpieces of God. As God’s chosen, they were called to speak the divine truth that had been placed upon their lips. God was for them. And yet, many others were against them. Perhaps, this is so because God’s truth is just that unnerving. When a prophetic word is directed at someone else, it’s easy for us to affirm, “that’s right!” But, when a rebuke comes unexpectedly and straight for us, well, there must be some mistake.

Friends, the interesting thing about God’s blessing is that it isn’t really for us. It’s for them – for all the earth. Just ask Mary who is said to have found favor in the

sight of God. Yet, favor is a strange way of speaking about the pregnancy of a young, unwed mother. When her child is born, she learns that he is in danger, so she and Joseph flee to Egypt, the land of their enemies, to avoid the wrath of King Herod, who was one of their own. Yes. Mary was favored by God, but others were against certainly her.

Later, when the boy grew and matured into adulthood, he became the leader of a nascent religious community called “the way.” Even so, the controversy and enmity that was present from the time of his birth never went away. It ultimately followed him all the way to a Roman cross. What kind of blessing is that?

Perhaps, it’s the kind of blessing that wasn’t really for Mary at all, but for them. For the Jews. For the Gentiles. For men, and women, and children. For people of every land and every language. For young and old. For rich and poor. For saints and sinners. You see, when God told Abram that he and his descendants would be blessed, the intention was that this blessing would always be shared. That the blessing would be sent out where it could spread and multiply.

And with this context in mind, we arrive at Paul’s letter to the Galatians. Reflecting on this text, Charles Cousar writes that “the unity [Paul] declares is not

one in which ethnic, social, and sexual differences vanish, but one in which the barriers, the hostility, the chauvinism, and the sense of superiority and inferiority between respective categories are destroyed.”¹ Surely, “being in Christ does not do away with Jew or Greek, male or female, even slave or free, but it makes these differences before God irrelevant.”²

So what do you suppose that it means that we are blessed to be a blessing? I think about last Sunday and how our congregation attempted something new. At 4 p.m., we held our first ever Jazz Vespers worship service. The attendance was greater than I anticipated, and there was a beautiful diversity represented in both the leadership team and in the pews. When the service had ended, people I had never met told me how connected they felt to God by worshipping in that way. One woman told me that it was the most moving worship service she had ever attended.

For me, the message seemed clear – that God is with us. So while we may, from time to time, encounter those who are against us, we celebrate the final victory of Christ’s resurrection from the grave, as well as the joyful proclamation that we are all one in Christ.

¹ Charles B. Cousar, *Galatians, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, ed. James Luther Mays, (Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 86.

² Cousar, 86.

Today is World Communion Sunday. On this occasion, we pause to reflect on our communion with God and with one another. And as we enter into worship in this beautiful sanctuary, we acknowledge that this Table, this building, and this place do not belong to us. Instead, Westminster belongs to God. And because this church belongs God, it also belongs to them – that is, to all of Abraham’s true children “whose identity is rooted in trusting God’s promise.”³

Surely, we are blessed to be a part of this community. Yet, from the time that it was conceived, Westminster was never intended for the sake of our exclusive enjoyment. Instead, God provided this church as a gift to Akron, Ohio, so that Christ’s purposes might be known in this place. Two thousand years ago, the Galatians were “brought into God’s family as children” through Christ’s gracious act of faithful self-giving.⁴ And now, two thousand years later, we too become a part of God’s family through Christ’s gracious act of self-giving.

In essence, God’s faithfulness is the foundation of our faith. As Richard Hays reminds us, “faith is not a matter of mustering a heroic capacity to believe the odd

³ Richard B. Hays, *Galatians, The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary Volume XI*, ed. Leander Keck (Abingdon Press, 2000), 256.

⁴ Hays, 271.

or the miraculous; it is simply a matter of receiving gratefully a gift that God has chosen to give us, completely without regard to our deserving. It is a matter of reliance on the Word of God as the one truth upon which we stake our lives.”⁵ It is a gift we receive with reverence, awe, wonder, and hope, that all are one in Christ.

May it be so and all thanks be to God.

⁵ Hays, 275.