

June 20, 2010 Pentecost 04C

Isaiah 65:1-9 Psalm 22:19-28
Galatians 3:23-29 Luke 8:26-39

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. 27 As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 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. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

It's summer. The kids are out of school. "No more pencils, no more books, no more teacher's dirty looks."
(And teachers thinking no more squirrely kids!)
Liberation. Freedom.

“Now that faith has come we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian. “

We’ll be thinking for a while about that word ‘disciplinarian.’ Picture a stern face and a hickory switch. The vice-principal with a Marine Corps haircut. The Nine Foot Nun.

The word disciplinarian is paidagwgo.j (PAIDAGOGOS) It’s where we get our word Pedagogue, or pedagogy. But it should not be translated “teacher.”

The Paidagogos was a slave whose job was to accompany children to and from school. This slave was the protector of the family, driving off any ruffians or bullies, but also keeping the kids in line. This slave was a sort of stand-in for parental authority. This paidagogos applied discipline, demanded proper behavior. The paidagogos will not let the bully punch you, but the paidagogos might rap your knuckles when you’re out of line.

Protection and behavior control. Disciplinarian.

Paul is saying that this is the role of God’s law. This idea is shapes Martin Luther’s teaching that the law is a fence and a mirror. The fence keeps me out of my neighbor’s affairs and keeps my neighbor out of my affairs. That is protection. A fence says “Don’t go there.”

The law also tells me when I am guilty of bad behavior. It shows me my own unworthy acts and desires. Like a mirror.

The other important thing to know about the paidagogos- the disciplinarian- is that when the child reached adulthood, the slave no longer had any authority. The position of paidagogos was always temporary. Position terminated. Services no longer needed. Or the slave stayed on, but was re-assigned.

Paul is saying that once Jesus Christ came, the disciplinarian was dismissed. The end of the law. There is a conundrum here. How do we live without rules? How do we live with real freedom? What will happen if School is out from now on?

The book of Galatians has been called an essay on freedom in Christ. But freedom is dangerous. No more disciplinarian? No more limits? No more rules? The paidagogos stripped of power?

When we seriously face the prospect of freedom, we begin to imagine chaos.

People decide and act and there are consequences, and outcomes. A terrorist is exercising freedom when building and using an explosive device.

Freedom gives us choice and independence, and it also gets us default credit swaps, and a financial house of cards. Freedom is deciding whether or not to be married, and it is also freedom that brings on infidelity.

No wonder we start to hedge when we talk freedom. It has been that way since the first decades of the Christian Church. Christian missionaries came to the churches of Galatia, worried about the dangers of freedom. Freedom can be abused, so they started teaching gentile Christians that they needed to embrace Jewish law.

Paul had evangelized Greeks without asking them to become Jews. Now someone was introducing a message that said, 'Christ is Lord, but the old laws must be kept.' In other words, all of a sudden, Jesus was not enough. Paul was furious, and he wrote this letter.

Paul claims that when Christ came, we were no longer subject to the disciplinarian.

There's no more threat. There's no more "You HAVE to."

Isn't that dangerous? Doesn't that mean we will all slide into chaos? How can people guilty of this or that sin be standing here claiming they are forgiven? Doesn't this mean we will be rubbing elbows with SINNERS?

Yes. Yes. Their sins, my sins, your sins. As the psalmist said "If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?" (Psalm 130:3)

In Christ Jesus you are judged by what God sees in Christ Jesus. You have been clothed in Christ.

ANYONE naming the name of Christ as Lord is clothed the same raiment. Our one-ness does not come from behavior, or politics, or success or diplomas. Our identity in Christ is not **our** creation woven out of a few strings of good deeds or honest dealing.

In Christ there is a new creation and the distinctions that the world recognizes are not relevant. Everyone in Christ is a new creation, whoever you are, whatever you do or don't do.

When a child left the care of the disciplinarian, that child was no longer a child. In Christ you receive a share in the value of the household, an inheritance, a position in the world and the city, and the marketplace. You are an equal.

Even our guilty conscience, that sign that decency and morality are not dead- even that must give way to Christ Jesus. Our guilt is the result of moral bean-counting, and when we keep our own record it's because we think we are going to prove something.

Later on in Chapter 5 Paul comes back to the worry about chaos.

"For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Gal 5:13-14)

Being in Christ and not the disciplinarian is not a move from the order of rules into the chaos of anything goes. It's the other way around.

The man Jesus healed in the gospel moved from the heated chaos of madness into the cool calm of Jesus' presence, a total gift.

All the madness is over. Rest now. Live in freedom. School's out. In Christ there is a new creation. You're going to love this new world.