

Christ Children¹
Galatians 3:23-29
Sunday, June 23, 2019
Pentecost +3C
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It's been weeks now, but I find I'm still reflecting on the experience of riding in a truck bed around the French Quarter for my first Pride Parade. The sea of love, block after block, the warmth and affection coming off of the crowds we passed by. Throughout this month I've heeded the reminder that Pride began as a protest and not merely a New Orleans-style-parade; a movement and not a party. And thus my presence there is as one who is aligning herself with a movement and testifying to the truth of the movement's message. As such, I'm facing my sheepishness in the truck that night at knowing the rainbow cross beside me and the role I inhabit within organized religion is terrifying to many people we passed because of a lifetime of trauma at the hands of the Church. And in recent weeks, I have taken seriously the numerous emails asking me if the welcome I offer is true, if this church really is a safe space to enter, will I really love without caveat. I've spoken with the parents LGBTQ+ children and assured them the love I offer, the love we offer, the love we are seeking to embody has no caveat even if the churches they come from say otherwise.

In fact, celebrating Pride this year in a fuller and more intentional way, not just as an ally but as an ordained representative in The Church, has given sturdier shape to my love because I better understand now that a protest needs some signs and a movement needs some language. Love isn't some amorphous, floating emotion—it's a thing with legs and action and shape. I am not yet ready to leave The Church because of the trauma it has inflicted on so many, even me. Instead, at least for today, I feel called to repair and mend within the existing framework of my tradition and offer a different, hopefully better, way to love the world in Jesus' Way and name.

"[I]n Christ you are all children of God through faith...[t]here 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." I wonder what Paul really means in these words from his letter to the Galatians? In the past, I think I have read them as a melting away of the identities that divide us and into the oneness of Christ's love—perhaps in the same way you can melt old, broken crayons in muffin tins and make new, multi-colored rounds. But it's

¹ 1st in 2019 summer series using *The Universal Christ* by Richard Rohr as a supplemental guide

the pageantry of our Pride Parade that is helping me more than any other teaching to get at the idea of a true oneness—a gathering with drag queens and Walgreens, Big Freedia and Entergy, all kinds of dress and shapes and sizes of folks with some radical Baptists thrown into the back of a truck alongside a sparkling cross. Believe me, identity wasn't disappearing in that crowd. No one was ceasing to be distinct from the other or going unnoticed. But our purpose was one. The pull to stand in a hot field for 2 hours in the blistering sun long before moving through the streets together was one.

And I know comparing Paul's words on male and female to the unifying love of drag queens and preachers together as one during Pride might be the most heretically scandalous thing some folks have ever heard. But I think what Paul was saying here hit some ears as the most heretically scandalous thing some folks had ever heard. What we are saying we give our lives to is scandalous. My hope this summer is that we jump into mystery and some weird, awkward texts of scripture and rediscover the scandalous power of our faith. To say we are one family, siblings together, children of the Christ, no matter what identities the world around us manipulates to divide us, is a radical profession of faith.

We know that Paul and those writing in his name were largely speaking to gathered communities of faith known as the early church through the old letters we can still access in the Bible. Jane Lancaster Patterson observes, "Paul was focused on creating communities that were outposts of life 'in Christ'...[his] apostolic mission was thus to prepare the people in his assemblies (*ekklesiai*) to relate to one another as though they were in the very presence of God, as indeed he understood them to be when they gathered in Christ's name."²

He starts off in this passage presumably throwing some shade at Judaism. Let's name that. Let's acknowledge that words like these have been used to fuel and support anti-semitism. Poor interpretations of these fragments of ancient letters from 21 centuries ago have been used to discredit a religion far older than our own and one that, I believe, our own was meant to be a subset or interpretation of and not a supplanter. Be that as it may. Paul writes, "Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. ²⁴Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian..."

Oof. Okay. Without unpacking, it sounds like he is saying his old tradition was faithless, without revelation, and ultimately a prison of law and duty and obligation. I need

² http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4099

to remind us all again that Paul, like Jesus, was speaking against mal-formed religious practices of his day that were so toxic they may as well have been called faith-less, revelation-less prisons of law and duty. But not because they were Jewish. But because that's what we humans seem to do with structures and some power and a little authority. Take our time, for example. Franklin Graham and I are both preachers in the Christian tradition in the 21st century in the United States of America. We are holding the same sacred texts that we have held since our childhoods, and we are reading them in DRASTICALLY different ways. We are looking at the president of this country and the political moment around him and seeing two very, very different scenes. One of us believes our tradition can become synonymous with empire and the other believes our tradition calls us to rail against empire and its dangerous capacity to "other" people until brown-skinned children are in concentration camps and no one cares.

Paul is speaking about *THIS* human instinct of faith-less, revelation-less prisons of law and duty that keep a few in power and cast a whole lotta people out. And that isn't the stuff of faith. Paul used to be part of that scene before his mind and heart were broken wide open. We don't want to be about that faith-less, revelation-less stuff here, either. We want to be part of the mystery of the Christ that draws us deeper and deeper onto the way of Love even if we aren't quite sure what that means.

In his latest book, *The Universal Christ*, Richard Rohr asks, "What if Christ is a name for *the transcendent within* of every 'thing' in the universe? What if Christ is a name for the immense spaciousness of true Love? What if Christ refers to an infinite horizon that pulls us from within and pulls us forward too? What if Christ is *another name for everything*—in its fullness?"³

Let's sit with those questions for a few seconds, shall we? We're going to be exploring Rohr's book for many weeks to come, and I want to savor his questions rather than speed through them as a task to accomplish. Hear them again:

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³ Rohr p. 5

⁴ Rohr p. 5

Now let's apply the framework of those questions to our Galatians text this morning: What if Paul is talking about a path of releasing, undoing, unlearning, and unbecoming? What if the stuff of religion as *they were practicing it* was the stuff of ego? And ego separates. Ego ranks. Ego creates hierarchy. What if the way Paul is laying out eliminates all of that and draws us together in a wild and beautiful, radical and daring oneness?

This is not what we think of religion as doing. "I'm spiritual but not religious," the popular descriptor goes. "I'm not into organized religion," so many say. If we begin to paint a picture of the *not religious* and the rejected organized religion itself, I suspect it's also something I don't want any part in. I suspect it's also what Paul is pushing away as a faith-less prison. This isn't about poking at Judaism or Christianity. This is about love as a litmus test. Is the tradition I'm practicing inviting me to love bigger and transforming my heart and mind and soul as I am made utterly and completely new by the revolutionary love of God?

"The essential function of religion," Rohr writes, "is to radically connect us with everything. (Re-ligio = to re-ligament or reconnect.) It is to help us see the world and ourselves in wholeness, and not just in parts." Therefore, "A cosmic notion of the Christ competes with and excludes no one, but includes everyone and everything (Acts 10:15, 34) and allows Jesus Christ to finally be a God figure worthy of the entire universe."⁵

And in this loving universe, people can gather in all their genders, in all of their class distinctions, in all of their categories that faith-less prisons and toxic empires use to divide. In this loving universe, Christ calls them siblings and children in one household. Surely that is why English mystic Caryl Houselander writes, "Realization of our oneness in Christ is the only cure for human loneliness."⁶ The broken structures we know rely on separateness and shame and isolation. The Christ household is built on love and connection and drawing all things and all people back into right, healthy, whole relationship with one another and with God.

This is what we are about here. We are this kind of Christ household and Christ children. We are about this kind of radical inclusion. We are about this kind of revolutionary love. This is the way that is re-ligamenting and reconnecting us. My siblings, welcome to the household.

Amen.

⁵ Rohr, p. 7

⁶ Rohr, p. 3