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Sermon for the 7th Sunday of Easter

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Sermon for the 7th Sunday of Easter Narrative Lectionary – Year 3 – Luke

Joanna Miller¹

Texts: Galatians 3:1-9, 23-29

Again, this morning, we've heard from Paul's letter to the people of Galatia. Last week, we heard parts of the first two chapters of Galatians² and now in chapter three Paul is still responding to this division within the church wherein some Jewish Christians are claiming that Gentile Christians must observe Jewish law (and be circumcised) while Paul adamantly argues that law observance is not a pre-cursor to being a Christian.

While those who argue for law observance cite texts from Genesis and God's covenant with Abraham that was denoted through the circumcision of Abraham and his sons, Paul uses a text from a couple of chapters earlier in Genesis citing that Abraham was blessed and it was because of his belief in God (not his law observance), where it says that Abraham "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."³ Paul argues tooth and nail – as we heard last week – that we are justified not by works of the law, but through faith in Christ Jesus. He confidently writes that if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing. This is his bold assertion and we are bold to believe it.

For Paul, once Christ died and came back to life, we all began to exist under God's grace – God's new era of justification. And once we are baptized, Paul says that we are all children of God – heirs of the promises, no matter who we are, where we come from, what we look like. Which leads to what is likely the most famous verse from this particular letter, that "as many of you as were baptized in to Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."⁴

I have to tell you, I hear these words among some of the strongest words of gospel and grace in all of Scripture. Many times, I have reflected on these words and felt both a strong dose of peace and a firm call to action. But this week, as I sat down to write, I found myself uneasy. While these words sound so powerful, when I look out into the world and into my own experiences I see that the world does not operate this way. The world very much likes to separate by ethnicity, skin colour, social economic status, gender, sexuality, and just about anything else you can think of.

Our world operates on the assumption that the most 'normal'/'culturally appropriate' thing to be is white, male, straight, healthy, English-speaking and wealthy. And the more you deviate from those things that are considered to be normative, the more likely you are to have to fight for equal treatment. And that means that those of us in this room have a bit of a problem, because most of us in this room don't stray too far from what society deems to be

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² The previous week's preaching text was Galatians 1:13-17; 2:11-21

³ Genesis 15:6

⁴ Galatians 3:27-28

the desired norm. So we are faced with a big challenge, which is: identifying with those who find themselves on the other end of the spectrum. Now, I know this is uncomfortable to hear, but truth is sometimes hard to hear. And the truth is, that most of us have spent very little time thinking about what it's like to walk out into the world everyday with skin that's a different colour or with a sexuality the world labels as 'perverse' or 'an abomination', or as someone who has no resources available to them.

So I'm asking you to ask yourself today: What is the lived experience of someone born on a 'reservation', who is born into poverty, to parents who survived residential schools and carried home scars of abuse, only to no longer be able to communicate with their community in their native language? We have absolutely no idea what our indigenous sisters and brothers have endured. We have no idea how hard it is to get ahead when you are born at such a disadvantage.

What is the lived experience of someone who is no different than you or I with the exception of the pigment of their skin? What is it like to know that some people don't make eye contact with you because the assumption is that you have a bad temper or you're more likely to be a criminal? What is it like to go to work and have people be 'extra nice' to you because they are subconsciously afraid of you? We have no idea what it means to worry that you won't get the promotion or that you'll get pulled over by the police because of the colour of your skin.

What is the lived experience of the person who the world, and especially the church, have called abominations? To walk out into the world knowing that who you are (because let's be honest, not one of us here decided who we would be attracted to), is considered to be damaged? How do you believe yourself worthy of love if the very people who say they represent God tell you that you aren't?

What is the lived experience of the woman who has had to work twice as hard to prove that she's capable in business? Who has to delicately balance her family life so that it doesn't become an imposition on her job, lest she be kept from advancing? Who gets judged based on how short her skirt or how bright her lipstick is, instead of the quality of the work she does? I could spend all day asking you these questions – about refugees, about people who are homeless, about people who wear religious head coverings, and the list goes on and on...

Now ask yourself if you've ever spent any real energy contemplating the life circumstances, situations, and realities of these people who deviate from the culturally most-acceptable white, male, etc.

If you agree with Paul, and I think you do... that in Christ there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female ... then you need to hear that both as good news and as a call to action. When you leave this place, your work begins - to be understanding, patient, empathetic – and most importantly, to be a loud voice for those who have no voice in the world. To stand up for the rights and equality of those who don't just get it every day, for those who have to fight to be equal. Use the power you have in your position for the good of the world. Don't just feel bad for operating out of a place of privilege, instead, use that place to make a difference for others – to work for true equality.

Paul's words speak the truth that in God's eyes, no one of us is better or more worthy than another. That **is** true – and it is our call to make the world look more like that too.

Amen.