**First Sunday after Christmas**

**Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY December 29, 2013**

**Based on Galatians 4:4-7 written by Vicar Ben Zuberbier**

**“Not the Law’s Slave—God’s Child”**

*4 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, 5 to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. 6 Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” 7 Since you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has also made you an heir.*

What if that birth we celebrated Tuesday night and Wednesday morning was *just* a tradition or custom we followed to remember the birth of a good man? What if all that preaching and teaching that Pastor and I do about Jesus’ death on the cross was just a remembrance of the love of a role model and nothing more? Since that story is more than just a vaguely familiar memory to most of you, what if we just threw the part about Jesus’ life and death out of our sermons and, instead, gave you a motivational speech on how you can go out and do better for Jesus during the week? Would you appreciate our efforts?

Apparently, the Apostle Paul’s gospel preaching and teaching just wasn’t doing it for some of the Jews who had settled into congregations scattered throughout the province of Galatia, which we would call Turkey today. You see, when Jesus died on the cross, he had lifted the ceremonial law, the law which had regulated certain aspects of Jewish living such as their work week or dieting habits. So when Paul had come to these congregations and told them Christ had set them free of from these old laws and regulations that they had grown accustomed to, they weren’t too happy. They didn’t want to see their traditions die.

So they put together a plan to see some of these old traditions and customs brought back to their congregations again, but it would infringe on the religious freedoms that the Gentiles in the congregation, or their non-Jewish members had. They really wanted to make these Gentiles into Jews. And enlisted them in a program where they could become Jews after three generations of carefully observing the old ceremonial laws and Jewish practices. Any Gentile who embarked on this journey to become a Jew was called a “proselyte.” But he really could be called a “slave.”

You see, these Jews weren’t just putting the Gentiles through this so they would be more Jewish in the way they lived and worshipped. They were actually teaching them that they would have to follow these laws that Christ brought to an end in order to be saved. They were corrupting their minds with the notion that to get to heaven it required baptism into Christ + circumcision. It required cleansing of sins in Christ’s death + staying clean by avoiding eating meat from an unclean pig. It required the rest won for us by Christ + rest from work on the Sabbath day. In short, they taught Christ + observing the law = salvation. Or maybe another way to put it would be, freedom in Christ + **slavery under the law** = rescue from sin.

But according to God’s Word, that’s impossible. Paul wrote in Romans chapter 3, **“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin” (v 20)**. In other words, Paul is saying, anytime you try to save yourself by attempting to follow the law perfectly, you only realize how sinful you actually are.

Maybe sometimes you feel like Christ’s death on the cross is an overused cliché to explain how a person gets to heaven. It might be a matter of pride that says, “I want to take a little bit of credit. Give me something to think about in the sermon that I can put into action so I’ll get nearer and dearer to God.” Or maybe you think just the opposite. I’ve heard a lot of believers who know Christ died to take away their sins say they think heaven has no place for them because of all the sins of their past or the sins that they continually struggle with. And I’ll admit, I’ve felt that way too. Whether you in your pride you feel like you can contribute to your salvation or you doubt that you’re saved because you’re not good enough, it’s the same issue the Jews were bringing into the churches in Galatia. You’re claiming Christ’s death + my good works = my salvation, or Christ’s death + someone better than me

= my salvation.

So this morning, Paul gives you and me a much needed reminder of how we are saved. Take a look at verses 4 + 5 of the Second Lesson in your bulletin. **“When the time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.”** What’s interesting here is that in just two short verses Paul goes from the story of Christ in the manger to Christ on the cross. From a stable in the small town of Bethlehem to an execution site on a hill called Golgotha. From Christmas to Good Friday.

Paul says in verse 4, **“When the time had fully come, God sent his Son.”** These words echo the Christmas story we heard this week according to Luke chapter 2, **“In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. . . And everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem. . . While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son” (Luke 2:1,3,4a,6,7a).**

In verse 4 Paul says, **“born of a woman.”** That woman was the Virgin Mary. The significance of the Virgin Birth was that Jesus wasn’t born sinful like you and I were. He was born sinless and the only perfect baby the world’s ever seen.

So Paul continues in his short story about Jesus, **“Born of a woman, *born under law*.”** When Jesus was born, he was born as a slave under the harshest and strictest slave-driver – God’s Law. He would have to serve as a slave in your place and mine because you and I are not capable of meeting all the demands of the Law. Jesus was though. And because you and I have broken God’s Law, the punishment that we deserve is death. Even though Jesus met all the demands of the Law and didn’t deserve that punishment, he willingly accepted the death penalty in our place and died on cross on a hill called Golgotha.

Why did Jesus take the punishment for us? Paul gives the answer in verse 5, **“To redeem those under law.”** The word “redeem” in the Greek means “to buy out of slavery.” Jesus did it to rescue you and me from under the jurisdiction and harsh enforcement of God’s Law. What that means for you, is you don’t have to do any works in addition to Christ’s work to earn a place in heaven. He paid the full redemption price. You don’t have to live in fear of the punishment the Law deals out for not keeping its demands perfectly, because Christ kept the demands of the law for you. What that ultimately means is what Paul says in verse 7, **“You are no longer a slave but a son.”** You are God’s child.

You see, Christ bought you out of slavery and welcomed you into God’s household as an adopted child. And now that you are in God’s household, he gives you the Law as a way of showing your thanks to him for sending his Son Jesus to buy you out of slavery. You are set free from under the law and are free to serve him by following the law. Just to be sure, when it comes to your redemption there are no rules to follow. When it comes to saying thanks for sending his Son to redeem you, he gives you the Law as a set of rules *to* follow. And he doesn’t just give you a set of rules to follow, he gives you privileges and rights as a child in his household. Paul said, **“God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, *that we might receive the full rights of sons”* (v 5).**

When you’re really in need of advice the first person you might go to is your father. After all, whether you realize it or not, he most likely knows you better than anyone else. He has more life experience. He’s someone you can trust. Even though our fathers here on earth may not always give the best advice or may be not always be around, if even at all, your heavenly Father is always a person you can go to in prayer.

He’s an all knowing Father and assures you and me he really is the best to go to for advice. He says in Jeremiah 1:5, **“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.”** Your heavenly Father knows you better than your mom or dad or best friend. He also knows what’s best for you and has your path already laid out for you. Later on in Jeremiah, in chapter 29, God the Father says, **“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you’” (v 11, 12).**

As God’s child you can talk to the heavenly Father in prayer like Jesus talked to him. Paul says in verse 6, **“Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out *‘Abba,* Father.’”** “Abba” is what a kid would have called his dad in the first century. “Abba” is a title of endearment. It’s the same title Jesus used when he prayed to his Father in the Garden of Gethsemane before he was arrested by the Roman soldiers. **“*‘Abba*, Father,’ he said, ‘everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36).**

You see, as God’s child you can address your heavenly Father in prayer with boldness, confidence, and full trust. And that’s exactly the idea behind the first line of the Lord’s Prayer, which in our Catechism is called the Address of the Lord’s Prayer, **“Our Father, who art in heaven.”** Martin Luther explains what it means to pray those words as a child of God, **“With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that he is our true Father and that we are his true children, so that we may pray to him as boldly and confidently as dear children ask their dear father.”**

Take a look at verse 7—**“So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.”** When I read the word “you,” I could point to one of you individually and say, **“*You* are no longer a slave, but a son; and since *you* are a son, God has made *you* an heir.”** That’s how a member sitting in one of the Galatian congregations would have taken it when Paul’s words in this verse were read. The Greek has the 2nd person singular, pronoun “you.” So Paul means “you,” personally. So when you hear the phrase, **“God has made you an heir,”** you can almost picture God the Father pulling you to the side alone so it’s just the two of you, and telling you what your inheritance is. In John 14, Jesus explains what this inheritance is, **“In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am” (v 2, 3)**. Since you are his child, God has made you an heir to a room in his eternal palace.

Paul reminds us this morning what the meaning of Christmas really is. **“When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.”** You are not the Law’s slave. You are God’s child. Amen.