

Stay on His Shoulders

June 19, 2016

Galatians 3:23-29

At Emanuel, we are reading Galatians in June and July. Here's where Paul has taken us so far. We are baptized and beloved children of God. Paul was called through God's grace. The Galatian Christians were called through God's grace. We are called through God's grace.

God's grace in Jesus makes us members of God's family. We enter God's family in Baptism into Jesus' death and resurrection. We gather as God's family at the Lord's Table. How does that family life work out day to day? **It's all about faith.** But what does that mean?

"Faith," writes Martin Luther, "is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a [person] could stake [one's] life on it a thousand times." The best word for this faith is "trust." Let me illustrate.

One night a house caught fire and a young boy was forced to the roof. His father stood on the ground with outstretched arms. He shouted, "Jump! I'll catch you." He knew the boy had to jump to save his life.

All the boy could see was flame, smoke, and darkness. His father kept yelling: "Jump! I will catch you." The boy protested, "Daddy, I can't see you."

The father replied, "I can see you. That's what matters." The child jumped. The child trusted his father and was saved.

That trust wasn't an intellectual agreement that the father existed. It wasn't the ability to recite the father's height, weight, age and hair color. It wasn't a decision that this man was really qualified to be his father. The child's faith was not certainty. The child's faith was trust.

Paul writes in Galatians three, verse twenty-six, "...for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith." **It's all about faith.**

What problem is Paul addressing in Galatians three? This story might help us understand.

Charles Blondin was a world-famous tightrope walker. He walked dozens of times over Niagara Falls. He crossed blindfolded, pushing a wheelbarrow, on a bike, on stilts and even cooked an omelet on the high wire.

He once carried his manager, Harry Colcord, across on his shoulders.ⁱ N. T. Wright describes this as "what must be one of the most supreme acts of physical trust ever placed by one human being in another..."ⁱⁱ

Wright asks a question. What if Colcord had second thoughts halfway across? What if Colcord had said, “This is all well and good, but I don’t trust you anymore”? What if he had insisted, “I need to do the rest by myself; if you don’t mind, I’ll walk the rest of the way”? People would think he had gone crazy. They would be right!

Paul says the Galatians have gone crazy. For them it’s no longer all about faith. Someone convinced them that they needed “Jesus plus”. Someone convinced them to jump off Jesus’ shoulders in the middle of the river. “Jesus plus” makes us crazy Christians.

It’s all about faith.

“Jesus plus” is not the Gospel. Paul reminds us in verse twenty-seven that “*in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.*” N. T. Wright puts it this way. “Faith...is the sign of membership from one side of the river all the way to the other.”ⁱⁱⁱ So don’t go crazy. Stay on Jesus’ shoulders!

This faith makes us one in Jesus. “*As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ,*” Paul declares in verses twenty-eight and nine. Our baptism washes away the distinctions that make no difference. “*There is no longer Jew or Greek,*” he declares. “*There is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*”

We embody that unity in Christ today. We’ve had another wonderful week together of Vacation Bible School. We show the world here and now that we are one in Christ around the Lord’s Table. In a few weeks we will share the Good News with young people in our day camp at Our Savior’s. We are grateful to serve together in the Food Pantry.

We live in a world defined by differences. We live in a culture deranged over divisions. This week Bishop Eaton reminded us that “It is a short distance from division to demonization.”^{iv} We live in a world crazy with conflict. We live in a time when religious, moral and political certainty equip people for murder.

One week ago we witnessed the tragic consequences of human divisions. We witnessed a personal form of insanity. We witnessed the consequences of our human insanity as well.

Today we oppose such insanity. Together we are a visible sign of what God creates in Jesus through the Holy Spirit. We embody the unifying love of God that makes Creation whole. It’s a privilege to be part of that witness today. **It’s all about faith.** Let’s pray...

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ⁱ This story is shared in N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians*, page 27.

ⁱⁱ Wright, page 28.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wright, page 31.

^{iv} <https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/7834>