

7 July 2019

Reading: *Galatians* 5:25-26 6:1-18 Text: *Galatians*
5:26 6:1

“Each of us is an original. Live creatively, friends.”

FREE AT LAST

Introduction: St. Paul: The Apostle we loved to loath! We loathed him because we didn't understand him. Eventually scholars taught us that the passages that made us loath him were not written by him anyway, but were added by translators who thought his message too antiestablishment. Paul's plain-speaking was also obscured, especially by the King James translation that many of us grew up with and even somewhat by the Revised Standard Version. It wasn't until contemporary vernacular versions of Paul began to be published that the full power and wonderful range of Paul's thinking was made obvious to those of us who did not know any of the biblical languages.

Interestingly, Paul the prosecutor, after his famous epiphany, had a major problem with the law. He spends a lot of time in his various letters to the churches of his

day telling people that the established religious law was invalid and didn't apply to them. He carried that debate to the Christian authorities in Jerusalem with somewhat mixed results. In his letter to the Galatians he rehashed, with considerable passion, this dispute. Finally saying, "All this talk about the law is gas. They themselves don't keep the law! And they are highly selective in the laws they do observe." Wonderful, here is Paul telling the church in Galatia that those folks in Jerusalem are farting in church! Fighting words indeed.

If the conformity demanded by the law is to be ignored then what have we to define who we are? Paul answers: "For my part, I am going to boast about nothing but the Cross of our Master, Jesus Christ." Conformity is demolished as Paul says **"Each of us is an original."** What a marvelous and sobering thing to realize. Sobering because if each of us is an original then our judgements must be based on individual performance rather than on broad categories. And even those judgements must be qualified. Paul notes that being an original "means we will not compare ourselves with each other as if one of us were better and another worse." Paul certainly knows how to take the fun out of disparaging gossip! Being an original is also sobering

because it allows us to focus on differences, not as obstacles to be overcome, but as resources to be nourished. It is so much easier to be negative about differences rather than supportive. It is frequently difficult to look at differences and to think how they compliment our own abilities – instead we too often look at the differences and pass judgement by noting the differences as deficiencies.

Fortunately, thinking of each of us as an original is also marvelous. Whatever your personal views of biology, it is very Christian to say that we are God's creation. While we share 98 per cent of our DNA with chimpanzees look at what we can do with that remaining 2 per cent! We can build whole civilizations. Yes, I know, it may take awhile and come with some grievous defects, but think of the potential that comes with our two per cent! As you get up in the morning you are justified to look in the mirror and say "I am unique in the universe. There is no one quite like me and the universe is the richer because of my existence!" Not a bad morning ego boost!

While you are enjoying your righteous claim to uniqueness, Paul gives us an additional push along life's pathway by telling us to "**Live creatively, friends.**" What

a wonderful opportunity to define ourselves -- to celebrate our very being. Perhaps you remember this little poem of Walt Whitman from the Civil War era.:
One's-Self I Sing.

One's self I sing, a simple separate person,
Yet utter the Democratic, the word En-Masse.
Of physiology from top to toe I sing,
Not physiognomy alone nor brain alone is worthy, for the
 Muse, I say the Form complete is worthier far,
The Female equally with the Male I sing.
Of Life immense in passion, pulse, and power,
 Cheerful, for freest action form' d under the laws divine,
The Modern Man I sing.

I think Paul would approve for he goes on to say
“Because of that Cross, I have been set free from the stifling atmosphere of pleasing others and fitting into the little patterns that they dictate.” Wow, how much of my life have I made myself a prisoner of little patterns, barely breathing in that stifling atmosphere of trying to please others. From this Christ has set us free! It is not a self-indulgent freedom that Christ gives. Quite the

contrary! We are “not to allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good. . . don’t give up, or quit. . .Every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all.”

Here is freedom with lasting meaning and consequences. Once again, Paul: “Can’t you see the central issue in all this? It is not what you and I do. . .It is what *God* is doing, and he is creating something totally new, a free life.” We are unique, we have the capacity to be creative. We are charged by Paul to break the bonds of convention and use our freedom to create community and serve all those around us. Paul: “All who walk by this standard are the true Israel of God – his chosen people. Peace and mercy on them!” Amen