

Minnesota Valley Church

Date: Sunday, March 19, 2023

Church Year Date: 4th Sunday in Lent

THEME: The joy and freedom of the Spirit-filled life vs the bondage of legalistic religion. Prelude: Carol Gustafson Singers: Osthus & Others

CALL TO WORSHIP: *Psalm 132:13-18*

P: For the LORD has chosen Zion,

C: He has desired it for his dwelling:

P: "This is my resting place for ever and ever;

C: Here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it--

P: I will bless her with abundant provisions;

C: Her poor will I satisfy with food.

P: I will clothe her priests with salvation,

C: And her saints will ever sing for joy.

P: "Here I will make a horn grow for David

C: And set up a lamp for my anointed one.

P: I will clothe his enemies with shame,

C: But the crown on his head will be resplendent."

Hymn #513 vss 1,3,5 "Jesus, What a Friend for Sinners

Confession of Sin: *I lay my sins on Jesus, The spotless Lamb of God; He bears them all and frees us, From the accursed load. I bring my guilt to Jesus, To wash my crimson stains, White in His blood most precious, 'Till not a spot remains. Amen*

Children's Sermon:

Reader: Carol Hoikkala

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: *Exodus 16:2-21 In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. 3 The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." 4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my*

instructions. 5 On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days."

6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, 7 and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?" 8 Moses also said, "You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD."

9 Then Moses told Aaron, "Say to the entire Israelite community, 'Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.'"

10 While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud.

11 The LORD said to Moses, 12 "I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.'"

13 That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. 15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was.

Moses said to them, "It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat. 16 This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Each one is to gather as much as he needs. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.'"

17 The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little.

18 And when they measured it by the omer, he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little.

Each one gathered as much as he needed.

19 Then Moses said to them, "No one is to keep any of it until morning."

20 However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them.

21 Each morning everyone gathered as much as he needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away.

GOSPEL LESSON: *John 6:1-15 Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), 2 and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous*

signs he had performed on the sick. 3 Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. 4 The Jewish Passover Feast was near. 5 When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" 6 He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. 7 Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" 8 Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, 9 "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" 10 Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. 11 Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. 12 When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." 13 So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. 14 After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." 15 Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

Confession of Faith: 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 (p. 52)

Gloria Patri: Ambassador Hymnal p. 4 *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Amen.*

Announcements and Prayer Concerns

PRAISE AND WORSHIP: CHOSEN BY CAROL

SERMON: RELIGIOUS SLAVERY OR SPIRITUAL FREEDOM, Galatians 4:21-31 Pastor Tom Olson *Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen*

CRABBY: Today we continue our Old Testament series by preaching from the New Testament! Galatians 4 is rooted in the Old Testament. It is a discussion about two types of religious faith. One is LAW-ORIENTED, harsh, negative, demanding and

powerless. The other one is GRACE-ORIENTED, loving, joyful, peaceful and powerful. We might call it the "Spirit-filled" life.

CREEPING: Critical Jewish legalism was creeping into the church and Paul the Apostle addresses it head on with an illustration from the Old Testament. Galatians 4, beginning at verse 21:

I. TWO PATHS: SLAVERY OR FREEDOM

Galatians 4:21-23 Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. 23 His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise.

ISHMAEL: Paul shows us here that one path, is the path of SLAVERY. He compares it to Abraham's son that was born of a slave woman. That son was named Ishmael. We need to remember what God told his mother he would be like.

Genesis 16:12 "He will be a WILD donkey of a man; his hand will be AGAINST everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in HOSTILITY toward all his brothers."

LESSON: If legalistic religion is like Ishmael, we could say it is:

1. WILD LIKE ISHMAEL: out of control, demanding
2. CONTRARY LIKE ISHMAEL: against things, critical, and negative
3. HOSTILE LIKE ISHMAEL: always ready to fight, to argue, to push and shove, confrontational

CAVEAT: Now don't get me wrong. I am not saying we should not be against sin. All I am saying is that we should live in an exemplary way, bathed in love, rather than demanding that others live up to a certain standard.

ERROR: We are tempted to focus on worldly things and get like Ishmael: demanding, critical and hostile. But it is not “the way of the cross.”

NEED: The world needs to see and experience the love of Christ demonstrated by the church. I Corinthians 13 in a modern translation says, **“If I have not charity, if love does not flow through me, I am nothing, Jesus reduce me to love.”**

REVIVAL: The whole Asbury College Revival started with one simple prayer. It was prayed by the preacher that day, a Christian and Missionary Alliance pastor named Zach, who preached a very simple message from Romans 12. It was the opposite of the harsh spirit of religious slavery of Ishmael. Pastor Zach prayed these words:

“...(Help us to) become love in action. Would You produce fruit in this room, in these souls, these minds and these hearts? Just do a new thing in our midst and revive us by Your love.”

QUESTION: What path are we on today? The angry, negative path of religious slavery, or the joyful and loving path of spiritual freedom? ...TWO PATHS.

II. TWO COVENANTS: JERUSALEM BELOW AND JERUSALEM ABOVE

Galatians 4:24-27 These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. 25 Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. 27 For it is written: "Be glad, O barren woman,

who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband."

CHOICE: Paul tells them that they have a choice of which covenant to live under. There was a tendency to stay with the Old Covenant from Mt. Sinai that was keeping them in bondage like the current city of Jerusalem was in religious bondage. It was a very religious place with zealous followers. But it was the very place and environment that produced religious leaders who rejected and killed the prophets, John the Baptist and the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

SAD: One of the saddest statements in the Bible comes from Jesus as he descends the Mt. of Olives, overlooking Jerusalem, and states these words in ***Matthew 23:37-38 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. 38 Look, your house is left to you desolate.***

ALTERNATIVE: The temple was dead. Desperate people bypassed the hypocritical priests and Levites, with their legalistic teaching in order to walk out into the wilderness to hear the beautiful words of life that Jesus was speaking and see the mighty deeds he was doing. This is the faith of “THE JERUSALEM ABOVE.” It is the faith that can be summarized in one word: “FREEDOM.” Freedom from sin, freedom from fear, freedom from the devil...

John 8:36 "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

2 Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

WINSOME: There is nothing more exciting than a Christian who has the “joy of salvation.” The new covenant brings peace with

God, contentment, thankfulness, gratitude and kindness. These are the virtues that will win the world to Christ. No amount of trying to force society to obey God will compare to one person who is filled with the wonder of salvation.

There is a song that puts it this way:

*There's the wonder of sunset at evening,
The wonder as sunrise I see;
But the wonder of wonders that thrills my soul
Is the wonder that God loves me.*

*O, the wonder of it all! The wonder of it all!
Just to think that God loves me.
O, the wonder of it all! The wonder of it all!
Just to think that God loves me.*

That is the spirit of someone whose heart is fixed on the Jerusalem above, not on the world below. Are we filled with the wonder that God loves us?

III. THE NEW COVENANT: THE JOYFUL GOSPEL-ORIENTED LIFE

Galatians 4:28-31 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. 30 But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." 31 Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

REMOVE: There is a phrase that jumps off of the page here: ***"Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son."***

What do you have to do if you want new carpeting in your house? You have to get rid of the old. To live that joyful, grace-oriented life we need to get rid of old ways: Ephesians 4:31-32: ***"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."***

ALETTE: When I was a teen, a retired single school teacher, named Alette Paulson, lived across the street from our house. She radiated. She loved flowers, she loved children and she loved Jesus so much. She would teach neighborhood children songs, Bible verses, poems and give us life lessons to think about. She taught me this great saying, ***"A smile is a gift you can give every day."*** Even though she was getting old and weak, she didn't complain. She was filled with the joy of the Lord. Her love for the Savior made an impression on many people.

GOAL: That is how I want to be. I want to be filled with love, joy and peace; all the virtue of Christ. That is what I hope people feel when they enter our church. No amount of harsh, angry, religion can compete with the love of Christ flowing through Spirit-filled believers. This is what the world needs to experience and I hope they can find it among us right here. This is the place to let go of RELIGIOUS SLAVERY and find SPIRITUAL FREEDOM. We will close with a song that was born in the grace-oriented, joyful, Swedish revivals of some 100 years ago.

Now may the peace of God that surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen

Hymn # 403 "O Let Your Soul Now Be Filled with Gladness"
Lord's Prayer & Benediction
Closing Song: Chosen by Carol

Postlude: Carol Gustafson