

June 20, 2010 – Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
The Very Reverend Dr. Philip C. Linder

“Lord, take my lips and speak through them; take our minds and think through them; take our hearts and set them on fire for your Holy Gospel.”
+Amen.

Recently, on my day off, I drove out to the stables where I ride. It was slightly cooler by late afternoon—I think it was 93 degrees instead of 103! I am presently riding a gentleman of a horse called Seminole Wind, a beautiful Appaloosa. When I arrived at the barn and led him out of his stall he looked and acted like usual. He was happy to see me and searching my hands and pockets for where the treats were stashed.

After completely grooming him, I began lifting his feet for the final part of my routine, their cleaning. When I got to his right front hoof, I immediately noticed that his horseshoe was askew—twisted and in need of repair—I wouldn’t be riding him after all that day. I was upset with myself for not noticing the difference in his stance or appearance earlier. How could I have missed the difference?

Missing the difference—Saint Paul proclaims to the Galatians, *As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3)* These words by Paul to the Christians in Galatia were profound 2000 years ago, and sadly they continue to be just as profound for our Church and world in

2010. Paul uses the image of our baptisms as clothing us with Christ Jesus; it is as if all of our outward and inward appearances are clothed alike and all separateness disappears. Our Jewish-ness, our Greek-ness, our male-ness, our female-ness, and our social status are all now on the same level playing field because we are Christian, human beings created in God's image.

Saint Paul reiterates in this epistle the same teaching that Jesus taught and lived—that we are not separate from one another as we are not separate from God, but rather all of us are related especially because of our life in Christ. The notion of being separate from each other is not something with which we are conceived and born. As an embryo that grows and develops within our mother's womb we only know what it is to be connected, both literally and figuratively. Yet from the moment that the umbilical cord is severed, we as well begin to be taught that we are indeed separate both from God and each other—and nothing could be further from God's truth.

Paul was proclaiming to the Galatians and early Christians that this Jesus who healed people possessed with demons did not discriminate. The message of Christ was the oneness of humanity that was God the Father's intention, and was in fact the dream of God for the kingdom of God.

How can we instead of looking at that which makes someone different from us, find that which makes us the same? How can we move from the paradigm of exaggerating our differences to instead seeking common ground? This call of Christ and proclamation of Paul may in fact be harder today than ever before. The focus upon differences within our own nation is presently intense. The focus upon differences is a part of our sinfulness that

wants to believe that we are somehow better, perhaps even more entitled than the other person who is different. Jesus would say otherwise.

I have always found the image in today's gospel of the possessed swine jumping off the cliff and drowning as somewhat comical; that is until now. I could imagine these same swine being possessed with the sins of all of us when we focus upon our differences jumping off the cliff and drowning, and I can imagine that would not be comical but instead be very pleasing to God. Imagine as a Christian missing the differences. **+AMEN.**