
Church of the Beatitudes United Church of Christ

Crucify, crucify, crucify. O my

A Sermon by

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Scripture: Galatians 6:14-17

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♫ God is still speaking,

If you receive the United Church of Christ on line daily devotionals like I do, you received one the other day that said, "Are you tired yet?" Authored by Quinn Caldwell, a pastor at Old South Church in Boston, Massachusetts, he writes, "We're 25 days into the 40 days (plus Sundays) of Lent. You who gave something up are probably really missing it, and you who took something on might be wishing you hadn't been quite so ambitious. Even you who didn't take on a devotional practice have been walking with Jesus down a hard road, right into the heart of darkness."

I cannot really say that I am missing those Brussels sprouts that I gave up. And I was on vacation with my daughters when I got the e mail. I had a great time at the Habitat work day that I took on this year and look forward to next weekend putting on a roof.

Still the question, "Are you tired yet?" rather haunted me.

Here at Church of the Beatitudes we have been on a Lenten Journey to the Cross, and the cross, once bare, is now filled with prayers. Throughout these weeks, I have read and prayed many of these prayers. Listen to a few:

Give me faith.

I pray for courage.

Let there be healing.

Thank you. Thank you, God, for loving me.

The cross, once far away, is now clearly in our face. We have explored what the cross means: Is it foolish? Does it matter? Does it change us? Now the Apostle Paul talks about 'boasting' about the cross. And soon and very soon, we will find ourselves 'colluding with unjust rulers and mob mentalities'. We may find ourselves shouting with others 'crucify him, crucify him'. Then, we will be standing at the foot of the cross.

His question is a good one, "Are you tired yet?"

Are you tired of being a Christian?

Are you tired of following the Way ... and the ways of Christ?

Are you tired of being counter-cultural?

Are you tired of giving yourself away to others?

Are you tired of being generous with your time and your money?

Are you tired of investing in a cause, a church, a hope bigger than yourself ... and one that will live on long past your days on this earth?

It has taken me a long time to appreciate Paul the apostle. It is fair to say that I came to appreciate Paul the apostle when I was a Minister of Evangelism, working with new and renewing congregations. I was based in Cleveland, Ohio, (Cleveland rocks), but spent 40 percent of my time traveling around the United States coaching new churches that were beginning, providing resources to churches that wanted to move from decline to growth. I was like a midwife, birthing something new and then watching it grow and develop. Paul did this by spending 40 years of ministry, walking around Asia Minor and Greece, and occasionally taking a boat, and then writing letters. I did it by Continental Airlines and email. Both of us fell in love with our churches, the Christ communities that were forming, the places of community and relationships and mission, which were all about Jesus.

The Christ community in Galatia, what we would call Ankara, Turkey, was one of the first congregations where Paul ‘tried out his new theology—that a person need not become a Jew before becoming a Christian.’¹ Remember, Paul brought the Gospel message to Galatia in the 40s AD ... less than 20 years after the crucifixion. The church in Galatia was thriving. Jews and Gentiles were joining. They were working together. They were overcoming their differences and becoming one body. They had the mind of Christ. They were caring for one another. They were showing the world a new way was possible.

And then Paul ... off starting another new Christ community, began hearing about their trouble. All was not well in Galatia. This congregation that Paul had birthed and nurtured and loved and was so proud of, was troubled, and in trouble. It seems like someone from Jerusalem had come in to “check on” Paul’s work. Someone had been sent in to “spy” on Paul. “What do you mean a man does not need to be circumcised first in order to be a follower? Jesus came to save the Jews. We can’t just let in ... all these Gentiles. What about the purity laws? We’ve never done it THAT way before.”

It only takes a few voices to distract the whole body from its true purposes.

So Paul writes to his beloved church, “For my part, I am going to boast about nothing but the Cross of our Master, Jesus Christ.” In his fairly short letter to the church in Galatia, Paul says at least six times, “It’s not about me. It is not about you ... IT IS ABOUT WHAT GOD IS DOING. God is creating something totally new, a new creation. And frankly, I, Paul, do not have time to be bothered by these petty disputes.”

Oh, Paul, I feel your pain. Such good things were happening in the church in Galatia. To be betrayed, hurt, sabotaged by a few. Oh, Paul, I think we all feel your pain. We are invested in a relationship, a trust ... and betrayal strikes. Are there words for such pain? The pain that cuts one right to the core? Shakes one’s foundations? Rocks one’s basic trusts? Could the words, ‘crucify him’ really come out of our mouths?

This is where I have learned to really admire Paul the apostle. He shakes off the dust. He steps out of the fray. He listens. He evaluates. He goes back to his core beliefs, core values, core mission and vision and passion: re-engages with God’s new creation. God transformed Paul’s life from a persecutor to a believer, God transformed betrayers, individuals into communities, and God’s will transformed their world into a justice place for all.

How? Remember my first question, ‘are you tired yet?’ Through us, through this church, other churches, other peoples of faith and good will, GOD IS ABOUT TRANSFORMATION through people who shake the dust off from moments of betrayal. GOD IS ABOUT TRANSFORMATION when people forgive the *broken* trusts and covenants. GOD IS ABOUT TRANSFORMATION when people refuse to listen to the petty ‘he said-she said’ and get about what Paul calls ‘the serious living of this faith’.

This next week, you who give to this congregation will be receiving an invitation to a lunch or dinner with Pastor Ted, with me, and with some of the leaders of the congregation. While

¹ <http://www.drbilllong.com/LectinaryII/Gal6II.html>

it has taken awhile, there is now a living document called A PLAN FOR OUR FUTURE. It arose from our mutual work together in the Appreciative Inquiry process where together we talked about Church of the Beatitudes at its best and doing more of what we do best. A PLAN FOR OUR FUTURE began to reveal itself even before Pastor Ted and I arrived, two and a half years ago. We did not come to lead a dying church. We did not come to watch lives and buildings crumble. We came believing that God had called us here at this time and to this place to add our lives to yours, knowing more people would join us, becoming part of the transformation, transformation of lives, transformation of the world. The PLAN FOR OUR FUTURE, the one we are already living out, invites all of us to be a part of the ministry of transformation.

- Grow the church in attendance and programs.
- Grow the church in revenue and decrease the amount we use from the Pulliam Endowment.
- Grow the church in outreach and service.
- Transform our buildings to match our vision of hospitality and welcome, being green, family centered, all the people.
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It's 27 pages of exciting reading, if I may say so myself! It's 27 pages where you suddenly say, "Yes, I want to be a part of that!" It's 27 pages of saying, "It's not about me. It's not about you. It is about what **that** cross, and **that** cross, and **this** cross calls us to be and do.

Jesus was crucified because he stood up to a system of imperial domination that oppressed people, saying that the domination system must end.² Jesus was crucified because some people were more concerned about the petty, the small, their own loss of power, than the true, the right, the empowerment of all. Jesus was crucified because he believed in justice, a Biblical justice that said justice is 'finding out what belongs to whom, and giving it back to them.'³

Justice is giving people back their dignity.
Justice is giving back their hope.
Justice is giving people back their worth.
Justice is giving people back the fullness of their identity.
Justice is giving back their path to God.

Paul says, "Quite frankly, I don't want to be bothered anymore by these disputes. I have far more important things to do—the serious living of this faith." The PLAN FOR OUR FUTURE, is for the serious living of our faith. Join with us in THAT living.

Amen.

² Marcus Borg, Reading the Bible Again, p. 256

³ <http://www.annistonstar.com/opinion/2005/as-insight-0424-0-5d22q0002.htm>