

# “Not I, But Christ”

Galatians 2:11-21, Pentecost 6-C, June 12, 2016

Brother and sisters, I am always so grateful for those words that Jesus spoke to his disciples on the night before he died: ***“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will declare to you the things that are to come” (John 16:12)!***

**For all that the first disciples of Jesus must have believed that they now knew about Jesus**—following his death and resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them that first Pentecost, **they still had more, so very much more to learn about Jesus and the farthest reaching implications of his holy Gospel.**

Yes, they had heard the **RISEN SAVIOR** command them: ***“Go make disciples of all nations!”***

The **Greek word here** for nations is *ethna* from which we get our English words “ethnic” and “ethnicity”—implying that our Savior’s Gospel should be carried to all peoples everywhere, of all different races; but these first disciples of **JESUS WERE STILL SO LIMITED IN THEIR THINKING—AT THIS POINT**—that in their **tunnel vision** they believed that **Jesus was only asking them to witness to the Gospel to other good Jewish folks like themselves**, who by this time had been dispersed all over the then-known world!

For all the **MISUNDERSTANDINGS THAT THE FIRST DISCIPLES OF JESUS MUST HAVE HAD**—about the very limited audience—to whom they believed the Risen Christ was actually now sending them, we also remember that there were **some very devout Jews who REJECTED THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST ALTOGETHER**. You know how St. John reminds us, ***“Jesus came to his own people, and his own people received him not. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, to them gave he the power to become the children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:11-13)***. Others were fierce persecutors of the early church who were committed to wiping Christians off the face of the earth!

**ONE OF THE MOST VIOLENT PERSECUTORS** of the early Church was a man of high distinction; one **“SAUL OF TARSUS,”** who though he was a Jew by birth, he was also a Roman citizen by birth. Prior to his conversion to the Christian faith there times he prided himself on his own great pedigree, pointing out to others upon occasion that he was: ***“Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness, under the law blameless” (Philippians 3:5-6)!***

**WHEN WE FIRST MEET SAUL OF TARSUS** (in the Bible) **IN ACTS CHAPTER 9, SOMETIME AFTER THE DEATH AND THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, SAUL** is now traveling down the road to Damascus, to do what he **FULLY BELIEVED—WAS THE WILL OF GOD—FOR WHOM TO DO THERE.**

He was going there as a Pharisee, as a highly respected Jewish man, as one who believed that he had become **very well-educated** in the teachings of the **Old Testament faith; taught by a highly respected rabbi** named Gamaliel. Saul of Tarsus was going there, St Luke tells us: ***“Breathing out murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1)*** with special written permission given to him by the high priest in Jerusalem, authorizing him to bring back any **“FOLLOWERS OF THE WAY” (ACTS 9:2)** – to Jerusalem, bound hand and foot with his high hopes of actually having them executed there.

Here was a very bright and well-educated man who thought that what he was doing was the will of God, when nothing could have been further from the truth. Saul of Tarsus was so

certain that what he was doing was the right thing—but from God’s perspective it wasn’t the right thing at all!

Therefore, one day as Saul of Tarsus was traveling down the road to Damascus, suddenly a bright light shone down from heaven and flashed all around him. And falling off of his horse and down to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him: **“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”**

And what Saul heard next, to his own great horror, were the words: **“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city and you will be told what you are to do” (Acts 9:5-6)!**

**Luke tells us that the men who were traveling with Saul were suddenly speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.** Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and **brought him into Damascus.** And for three days he was without sight, and he did not eat and did not drink a thing!

For Saul of Tarsus, this was the **LORD GOD ALMIGHTY INTERVENING INTO HIS LIFE** to tell him that no matter how well-intentioned he was in carrying out what he believed would be the will of God for his life—that he was wrong! He was 100% dead wrong!

Soon, thereafter, God sent a disciple named **ANANIAS TO THE HOME OF A MAN CALLED JUDAS**, whom Luke tells us was living at that time upon a street called **“Straight,”** where he found Saul praying; Saul who had already seen in a vision from God that Ananias would be coming to him.

And for **Saul of Tarsus whose reputation had well-proceeded him, you can only imagine just how shocked Ananias was when God told him to go to Saul of Tarsus,** because this man Saul was no one less than God’s very own chosen instrument to carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ—**specifically to the Gentiles** and also to kings and to the children of Israel. **When Ananias baptized Saul, something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight (Acts 9:1-19).**

**BROTHERS AND SISTERS, ONE OF THE REASONS I AM SO GRATEFUL TO BE LIVING IN THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA IS BECAUSE I AM MUCH CLOSER, LIVING HERE, TO THE SMOKEY MOUNTAINS** than I ever was when I was a boy growing up in my home state of Florida. There were a few times when my father would take off of work, during the summer, and take our whole family to the mountains in North Carolina and Tennessee; though vacations were certainly not something that happened every year back in those days; at least not for me and my family.

**I remember falling in love,** if that is not too strong of language, with the beauty of the mountains and remembering how much cooler the weather was there than back home in Florida; especially since we never had air-conditioning in the house in which I grew up until I was in the fifth grade.

To me there was then, and still is for me today, something that is actually breath-taking and absolutely beautiful about looking out upon the horizon, and rather than just seeing flat land, you see instead that beautiful mountain range, especially on a cloudless, sunny day. While all the mountains are beautiful, there always those mountains that seem to tower much higher in the air than do the others; piercing the deep blue sky with their glorious peaks in such a way that they appear to be holding up the sky!

Sometimes I feel this way when I am reading the Bible. Though all the words of the Bible are beautiful and nothing less ever than the inspired Word of God, sometimes, when I am reading along in the Bible, sometimes I come to those **PASSAGES HERE AND THERE — THAT FOR ME AT LEAST — SEEM TO TOWER OVER ALL THE OTHER VERSES THAT ARE THERE** — because they are just chocked full of so much **spiritual insight**, even as they are **overflowing with meaning.**

And I have felt this way for a very long time about our **SERMON TEXT** today in **GALATIANS 2:20**. It has always been one of my very favorite Bible verses. Here Paul, some years after his conversion to the Christian faith, **who in the earlier days of his life had believed that you and I as human beings, could actually somehow be made righteous in the eyes of God by our own efforts and attempts to keep the law of God perfectly**—had later come to believe that this was completely impossible on our part!

We are all by nature sinful and were at one time, as Paul tells the Ephesians, **“Children of wrath like the rest of mankind. But God who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he has loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses and sins, made us alive together with Christ and raised us up to be seated with him in the heavenly place—that in the coming ages he might show forth the immeasurable greatness of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light!”**

In this same letter of Paul to the Ephesians where he states this great truth about our salvation—he goes on to say in **EPHESIANS 2:8-9**, Paul writes: **“For by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not because of works lest anyone should boast!”**

Does this mean, therefore, that **AFTER WE ARE SAVED, WE SHOULD JUST LIVE THEN IN ANY OLD WAY** we want to live? Of course not! Paul writes in the next verse: **“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for a life of good works that we should walk in them” (v. 10)!** Paul was writing out of his own experience one day when he said, **“If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new is come” (2 Cor. 5:17)!**

**When Paul writes this letter of his to the church at Galatia, he was kind of miffed, to put it mildly.** Some false teachers had come into the congregation, who were doing their best to discredit Paul’s ministry as an apostle, much like they did in the church at Corinth.

To make a powerful analogy, Paul even recalls a time when even his good friend, St. Peter, who also knew full well that we are saved by the grace of God through faith in Christ Jesus and in no other way, was willing to soft-peddle the Gospel on one occasion when some representatives of the Church in Jerusalem and even their pastor, James the brother of Jesus, had come down to Antioch.

**PETER WHO KNEW FULL WELL—THE GOSPEL WAS GOD’S SAVING MESSAGE INTENDED FOR THE WHOLE HUMAN RACE**—was willing to flinch a little bit so as not to unnecessarily offend some of these high-ranking Jewish Christians who come to Antioch from the Church in Jerusalem. At this time and on this one occasion, **Peter refrained from sitting down at the same table and enjoy a fellowship dinner with the Gentile converts to the Christian faith**, because the folks from Jerusalem had come to believe that even if these Gentile converts were in fact Christians, they were still **second class citizens in the Church** of Jesus Christ.

In admonishing Peter, Paul didn’t mince any words. Paul didn’t pull any punches. He just powerfully reminded Peter--of what Peter, by this time, for a long time had already known to be true.

I agree with a great Christian author named Stephen Olford, who in 1995, wrote a book based on this passage entitled: **NOT I, BUT CHRIST**, that when Peter did this he was, once again, **“dodging the cross”** of Christ, as Peter had done a time or two before in his life.

When Jesus announced to the disciples, for the first time, that the Son of Man had to go up to Jerusalem and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes and be crucified and on the third day, rise again, Peter was greatly disturbed. He not only took Jesus off to a private corner in the room, he also rebuked Jesus saying: **“God forbid, Lord, this should never happen to you!” But then Jesus rebuked Peter, saying: “Get behind me Satan for you do not have in your mind, the things of God but the things of men” (Matthew 16:21-23)!**

Peter was dodging the cross, again, when he later denied even ever having known Jesus on the eve of our Lord's crucifixion, there in the courtyard of the high priest, saying three times: **"I KNOW NOT THE MAN!"**

And when Peter, in a moment of weakness, trying to please everyone, especially the Church leaders who were the bigwigs who had come down to Antioch from the church in Jerusalem, by refusing to eat a fellowship meal, and most probably also, **refusing to share the Lord's Supper with the Gentile converts for a time when James and the others were there, he was once again DODGING THE CROSS**—the cross upon which the Holy Son of God had died for the salvation of all people.

When Paul says, **"I have been crucified with Christ,"** Paul is reminding us that though Jesus was totally without sin, when he was crucified he was taking upon himself **THE JUST PUNISHMENT FOR PAUL'S OWN SINS, FOR YOUR SINS AND FOR MY SINS!** The law of God that can still show us our sins and lead us to repentance, however, no longer has the power to condemn us. Paul says in **Romans 8:1**, ***"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of human flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit"*** (Romans 8:1-4)!

When Paul says: ***"It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me,"*** he was asserting for himself to be true what Jesus had promised would be true for any of us, who repent of our sins and believe on him. On that night, Jesus said, ***"If anyone loves me, he will keep my Word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's Word who sent me"*** (John 14:23.)

Martin Luther certainly believed that it was possible for Christ to live within us. That's why he wrote those lovely words of his great Christmas hymn, "From Heaven Above" that say: ***"Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child, make thee a bed soft undefiled, within my heart that it may be, a quiet chamber kept for thee!"***

The Christian life is something that must be **EMBRACED BY EVERY ONE OF US AS INDIVIDUALS** if we are to experience the saving power of Christ at work in our daily lives. In this one verse of Scripture, St Paul uses 8 personal pronouns. Four times he uses the word "I" and four times he uses the word "me."

***"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me!"***

**I can't believe the Gospel for you** and you can't believe the Gospel for me! **What is true in the physical realm is also true in the spiritual realm.** I can't eat a **healthy diet** for you and you can't eat a healthy diet for me. I can't consume **water** for you and you can't consume water for me. I can't **sleep** for you and you can't sleep for me. I can't **be baptized** for you and you can't be **baptized for me.** I can't come here to **worship faithfully** for you and to **receive the Lord's Supper** in faith for you, nor can you come here and worship faithfully for me and receive the Lord's Supper in faith for me either!

***"The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God..."*** Paul was not only saying that he was trusting Christ to bring him to heaven on the day he died, but that he was trusting **God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, and the Son so loved you and me that he gave himself freely up unto death on a cross for you and me.** Christ with every aspect of his life, day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment already now. And the Father and the Son so loved you and me that they sent the Holy Spirit to you and me to bring us to faith and to strengthen us always in the faith. **To be able to say these words for ourselves again today, brothers and sisters, makes all the difference in the way that we approach life day by day.**

**And two of the greatest examples of this in our midst are a married couple named Hal and Susie Hoffman, who believe it or not are celebrating their 90<sup>th</sup> birthdays** this week with 33 family members who are visiting them from other places throughout the country here in South Carolina this week.

When you look those two people you can say to them: **“YOU HAVE BEEN CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST AND IT IS NO LONGER YOU WHO LIVE BUT CHRIST WHO LIVES IN YOU AND THE LIFE YOU NOW LIVE IN THE FLESH, YOU LIVE BY FAITH IN THE SON OF GOD WHO LOVED YOU AND GAVE HIMSELF UP FOR YOU!”**

Paul says elsewhere that when he was enjoying this life of Christ that he could enjoy—REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS, HE COULD EVEN LEARN HOW TO REJOICE IN THE MIDST OF HIS OWN SUFFERINGS, BECAUSE THE LOVE OF GOD HAD BEEN SHED ABROAD IN HIS HEART BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

I have a book on my shelf that is one of my favorite books, written by the great radio personality, Chuck Colson. He is man who has lived the Christian life fully. In a wonderful book he wrote to help explain to us Paul’s letter to the Philippians, he reminds us that because of his faith in Christ—St. Paul’s life was full of joy. He’s the one who wrote: “Rejoice in the Lord always...”

Colson points out that there are always many people in this world that when you asked them how they are doing, they will tell you: “Okay, I guess, under the circumstances!” But perhaps we should then ask them one more question: “What are you doing under the circumstances? As a Christian shouldn’t you be living above the circumstances, with the personal knowledge and belief that the Lord is at hand? Nearby and available to us now through God’s word and sacraments? Through the fellowship of others in the Christian community? Colson wrote that as believers: “We need to learn to balance the dark side of life with the bright glow of laughter!” (LEARN TO LAUGH AGAIN, Chuck Colson, 1992, page 21.)

In this same book Colson writes: “This year I turn 58. Thought I might as well let the whole world know. When you’re my age you discover that your closest friends are the most unmerciful in the cards they send you, especially when it comes to birthdays and getting old. On his 57<sup>th</sup> birthday, he received many cards filled with one insult after another. Here’s what the verse was inside of one card: “Confound your enemies. Amaze your friends. Blow out ALL your candles!”

Another said on the front: “Wish I could be there to help you light your birthday candles,” and on the inside, “But I’ll be watching the glow in the sky and thinking of you!”

Several more mentioned the cake and the candles: One warning me of two dangers: The candles would melt the frosting in 15 seconds, so blow them out as fast as you can! But once this happens the smoke alarm is likely to go off.

Garfield, the ornery cat, appears on the front of another. He is lying down (natural) and think (with one eye open), “You can tell you’re getting older when you wake up with that terrible “morning after” feeling and you didn’t even do anything the night before!”

“Rejoice in the Lord, always!” the apostle says. Always? Even today when I am so sad and troubled about a situation that seems to be totally out of my control in life? The apostle says: “Always!” And when we do, Paul continues: “The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus until life everlasting!” Amen