

Ebenezer Lutheran Church
A13proper08
Galatians 4:4-7 Title: Breaking the Cycle
August 17, 2008
Sola Gloria Dei

Last weekend, Jill, the girls, and I were in New York state attending the wedding of my niece.

It was also a great time to see all the rest of my immediate family, with only one nephew missing.

Because my side of the family is very spread out,

We don't get to see each other all together very often,

And it's an important thing to come together,

And celebrate being a family, catching up, watching the changes in the nieces and nephews,

Perhaps even smoothing some of the wrinkles in family relationships by being together,

Having a chance to talk face to face, be with one another.

And yet it is also easy, after such a time together, and then back in one's regular routines,

To let differences of opinion, and old patterns and old memories brew,

And let those wrinkles in relationships return, perhaps allowing some of them to crease just a little more.

Nothing bad, mind you, the way you and I would normally talk about "bad,"

Just enough to know things are not all well.

Perhaps like you, I've also watched the Olympics this past week,

And beyond the front page news of Michael Phelps, one story stood out,

The story of Kirsty Coventry of the African nation Zimbabwe.

If you've listened to any international news over the last couple of months,

You know that the nation of Zimbabwe is in near chaos,

With an economy in ruins, a corrupt government and President, and great social strains and stresses between rich and poor, black and white.

And yet for very brief periods of time, when this young swimmer swims,

A nation is united, there is dancing and celebration in the streets between all the peoples,

Babies are named after the swimmer,
And when she visits, one can honestly say that an entire nation rallies around her,
And for a few days, all is well in Zimbabwe.
Two weeks later, however, all is not.

There is something in us that wants the unity and the identity we have as a human family,
Whether we're talking about the nations of the world,
Or about the family we were born into, or have become a part of.
And there are many voices in our world that would make the claim that it is in the
triumph of the human spirit that we can overcome our difficulties and rise together in
peace.

That's certainly the hope and message of an event like the Olympics.
And even in more immediate relationships of family and friends,
We crave a unity and identity that brings us together,
Makes us a part of something beyond ourselves.
We recognize that it's important.

Sometimes we can sustain that identity and unity for a time,
Like over a wedding weekend, or over the two weeks of the Olympics.
But inevitably our hand is shown,
Our differences are accentuated, resentments grow and are held,
and relationships wrinkle and fray.

That wrinkling and fraying of relationship, whether with a family member,
Or a friend, or in a nation between communities, or tribes, or classes,
Is referred to in the scriptures as sin.
It's not a very popular word in our present day,
But it is an accurate description of what happens between people when unity, identity and
love falter.

The Apostle Paul spells it out in a particular way.

Paul says this life we live -- where our relationships occasionally come together,
but too often wrinkle and fray --
Is life under the law.
In multiple letters to the early Church,
Paul talks about how we cannot keep God's laws of relationship between us and our
neighbor on our own,
Or for that matter the relationship between God and ourselves.
The Bible itself provides countless stories of families, friendships, tribes, nations
faltering, coming apart, ultimately because of sin.
Differences accentuated, resentments grown and held, relationships wrinkled and frayed.
Paul describes this breakdown as a breakdown of a household.
As children being enslaved, without a family, without a household,
The relationship broken.

Maybe you haven't thought about your own family, work, or other relationship struggles
that way recently,
Or about Zimbabwe, or other international conflicts that way.
But if you read the Bible, God makes a claim.
God says, I don't want things to remain this way.
And so, Paul says, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,
In order to redeem those who were under the law,
So that we might receive adoption as children.
It was not enough that God was God.
God, our story tells us, took the step to bridge the gap of our relationships so the world
and we would be different.

This is what today's baptisms of Flynn, Clarissa and Tony are about,
And what each of our baptisms are about.
God is claiming us as children in a household.
The wrinkles and frays of our broken human relationships do not define us.
Our human spirit, which we hope will carry us through but often does not,

Is, because of Holy Baptism, guided by another Spirit, the Spirit of the Risen Lord Jesus,
So we can see and live a way beyond the same old pattern.

It's the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of
knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in God's presence.

Listen for that in the baptismal liturgy today when we pray over each of the newly
baptized.

This Spirit works without our knowing, and by water and the word we are joined to
Christ and his Spirit, and life is different.

And yet on this Mary, Mother of our Lord Sunday,

There is one other thing to say.

You may remember the story of the angel Gabriel's encounter with Mary in Luke's
gospel.

Gabriel announces what God's presence in Mary's life will mean.

Mary responded by asking questions,

Engaging the messenger who shared God's Word with her,

And ultimately, by making testimony of what God's action in her life would mean.

Not just for herself, but for the world.

In our Baptismal liturgy,

We see for the parents and for the baptized a response to baptism that is not passive.

We are not passive servants or slaves any more in this world,

But children of God, and not just children but heirs to God's kingdom.

Our lives are different, they are odd in comparison to the patterns of this world.

They involve worship, and teaching and scripture reading,

And prayer, and service to others, both to the familiar and stranger.

We bear God's creative and redeeming word to all the world.

And when we see in our own lives the old patterns and wrinkles tugging at us,

We know that Grace and forgiveness await us,

A loving Abba, waiting to celebrate our return.

A gracious God, who invites our questions,

Delights in our engagement with our faith,
Gives us each other to support one another in our faith,
And involves you and me in the salvation of the world through our testimony and sharing
as God's children, his heirs to the kingdom.
And one other thing;
As we live out our baptism and honor our baptismal promises,
What we find is that God's Spirit sustains us,
So that, as we encounter family reunions and the issues of the nations, and everything and
everyone else in our life,
We realize that God has made a way beyond the brokenness that we see in the world
around us, and at times in ourselves.
Because a claim has been made on us.
That's the importance of Flynn, Clarissa, Tony, and each your baptisms.
We are no longer slaves but children,
And if children than also heirs, through God.
True for you, true for this world.
Amen.