

**“WE’RE ALL DIFFERENT”**

**Pastor Mike Corwin**

**TEXT: GALATIANS 3:26-29    GOD’S WORD: MATTHEW 3:1-6**

**I – JOHN THE BAPTIST:**

One Sunday when Pastor Becky was preaching her series on the Days of Elijah, she spoke about John the Baptist and we read the Scripture about him in church that morning. I was sitting down front and listening to the same thing you were listening to, but I probably looked at it a little differently than you that morning. I was struck by the image of his physical appearance.

In that day and age when the religious folk all dressed up. When the Pharisees wore long and colorful flowing robes and had special headdress. When the priests were outfitted in their own prescribed priestly garments. How could anyone take John seriously? Here’s this man standing out in the wilderness yelling out at the top of his lungs:

‘Prepare the way for the LORD’s coming!

Clear the road for him!’”

And if that didn’t convince you he was crazy just take a look at his physical appearance. Ruff scratchy clothes made out of the hair of a camel with a leather belt keeping him from showing too much. I’m guessing he was probably unshaven, his hair was uncut, and his personal hygiene left a lot to be desired. And if all of that wasn’t bad enough...look at his diet! Who in their right mind would eat a bug dipped in honey!

Let’s be brutally honest. If you saw this man out starting a new church you would not sign up to be a member of his congregation. You may talk about him but it wouldn’t be in churchy language. You would question his sanity, wonder why he wasn’t locked away someplace to protect himself and others, and then hurry to another part of the wilderness away from him.

**II – HEARTBREAKING STORY:**

The next thought I have is that this is still the way people who are different get looked at today. And before we cast any stones it isn’t just the general population that looks at them this way...but the Church of Jesus Christ as well. I was recently told a story by someone I know that pointed this out to me and broke my heart. She gave me permission to share it.

This mother and father traveled to another state to visit their son, who is homosexual. They have visited with him numerous times and have gotten to know some of the people he associates with in his community. On a recent visit they were out with him and his partner on a patio café when one of

their son's friends came over to the table, put his arm around the mother, and thanked them for being parents to their son. She told him not to put them too high up on the pedestal because they had struggled with the issue just as others have. He said that it was Okay to struggle, but they still loved their son. He said a lot of them had no relationship with their parents anymore so for them to have one with theirs said a lot. Then he said that it was especially touching since her and her husband were "People of Faith" who not only still loved their son but spoke to his friends as well. This struck her and she spoke about it to this young man and he explained to her that in the community they were in they were not treated well by "People of Faith," were not given the time of day by the good church people, and we're definitely not allowed to come to church and worship with them. It was then her heart broke.

I have to tell you that mine has broken ever since. I don't condone the lifestyle and I think the Bible speaks plainly about it. But how can the Church of Jesus Christ not allow them to worship with them, not proclaim the Gospel to them, and not share the love of God with them. I have to tell you that if that community was in the East Ohio Conference I probably wouldn't be your pastor today because I'd be starting a new church in that community to put God's Love in Action!

### **III – I DON'T UNDERSTAND:**

I can't understand this behavior by Christians. We can give away food and clothing to those who are in poverty and some of them could probably work if they wanted to. We can support and help those caught in teenage pregnancy because they couldn't control their hormones. We can help those who are caught up in addiction and whose lives are spiraling out of control. We do it all in the hopes that if we show them the love of Jesus it will change their lives. But God forbid that we would show the same love and grace to a homosexual. God forbid that we would tell them about the love of God and the grace of Christ.

I don't see this attitude in the model we were given by Jesus. Can you imagine how your faith would be...the power of the Gospel would be if the story of Jesus was a little different? If you read the Bible and found Jesus saying come to me if you're blind and I'll put mud in your eyes and fix that. Come to me if you're crippled and have never walked and I'll get you up walking and send you home with your worthless matt. Got leprosy – no problem, let me touch you and make your skin clear again. Been bleeding for 12 years and the doctors can't fix you, grab my robe and I can heal you. But if you have toenail fungus it's game over. I will not heal you – that's just nasty!

But that's not the example he gave us. The one he gave us is completely different:

- He went and spoke to a woman who couldn't stay married and was a hated Samaritan. He revealed to her he was the Messiah before he told anyone else.
- A woman caught in adultery and drug before him for judgement was spared when he told the accusers the only ones who could throw a rock were the ones without sin.
- He allowed himself to be anointed by a known prostitute in the house of a Pharisee and proclaimed her blessed – not cursed.
- He called the tax collector Zacchaeus out of the tree and ate at his house with his other filthy tax collector friends and they all got saved.
- He died next to a murderous thief and yet took him to heaven with him that day.

He gave us the model that he didn't condone their actions, but he loved them anyhow and their meeting with him changed their lives.

#### **IV – TEXT:**

I think the Apostle Paul spoke to this very issue in his letter to the church at Galatia. He said:

#### **Galatians 3:26-29 (NLT)**

<sup>26</sup>For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup>And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. <sup>28</sup>There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup>And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.

Paul has just finished a session in his letter that talked about the law and how it had been used to make everyone prisoners of the law when in fact the law as given by God to point his people to Jesus. Now he moves on with his discussion to say we are no longer in bondage to the law but have been set free by our faith in Christ and because of that faith we are now sons and daughters of God, through our faith in Jesus the Christ.

We are true children of God when we are justified by our faith in Christ. It is when we find Jesus and put our faith in him that we enter into a new and right relationship with God. And the emphasis on this who passage is that “all” of the people who find Jesus are God's children.

Our baptism does not save us but is a sign that we have found this faith, that we have accepted Jesus as Savior, and our identity is now in him. It's like taking off your old dirty clothes and putting fresh new ones. We say that baptism is an outward sign of an inward grace. Our goal then is to become

more and more like Christ as we mature and grow in our faith. Today's baptism is a sign of the followers of Jesus instead of the Old Testament sign of circumcision.

Then in verse 28 Paul says it all. Catch the significance of the examples he gives. He is stating that there are to be no considerations of race, no considerations of social status, and no considerations of gender. And you could go on and on with the list but it all signifies this. All the differences are gone when people come to Christ. They become insignificant and lose their power to divide when faced with God's love. All differences are superseded by Christianity...by the followers of Christ.

And all of those who believe become one with all those who have found Salvation before us and we all become God's chosen people all the way back to Abraham.

### **V – NO UNLOVED:**

On the front of your bulletin is a statement of welcome. I and others worked hard on this as we prayed about it, thought about it, pieced together other such statements until we came up with the one we believed represented the love of God towards his people and how he wanted us to treat them all as we proclaim the Gospel. It says:



**We extend a special welcome** to those who are single, married, divorced, widowed, gay, confused, filthy rich, comfortable, or dirt poor. **We welcome you** whether you can sing or just growl quietly to yourself. **You're welcome here** if you're "just browsing," just have woken up or just got out of prison. **We extend a special welcome** to those who are over 60 but not grown up yet, and to teenagers who are growing up too fast. **We welcome those** who are addicted. **We welcome you** if you're having problems, are down in the dumps, or don't like organized religion. (We're not that keen on it either!) **We welcome those** who are inked, pierced, both or neither. **We offer a special welcome** to those who could use a prayer right now, had religion shoved down their throats as kids or got lost at the town square and wound up here by mistake. **You have found a perfectly imperfect church filled with perfectly imperfect people who worship our perfect Lord.** First time guests please pick-up a welcome gift at the information desk in the lobby. **Once again, Welcome!**

There are no unloved people in God's eyes. He created them all and he loves them all. Everyone sins since the very beginning of time and have been separated from God. His love is so great and so overpowering that he died on a cross in the form of his Son to save us all from that sin. He sent Jesus for everyone...no exceptions. Our job is to make sure everyone...all...get the message.

So ask yourselves this question. What differences do you see in others that keeps you from doing the job that Jesus gave you to go and make disciples of ALL the world? To make them sons and daughters too.

**AMEN**