

**The Lessons Appointed for  
Use on the  
Sunday closest to June 29**



**Proper 8**

**Year C**

**RCL**

Psalm 16  
Galatians 5:1,13-25  
Luke 9:51-62

**The Collect**

The Collect

Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and

reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for  
ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 16

*Conserva me, Domine*

- 1 Protect me, O God, for I take refuge in you; \*  
I have said to the LORD, "You are my Lord,  
my good above all other."
- 2 All my delight is upon the godly that are in the land, \*  
upon those who are noble among the people.
- 3 But those who run after other gods \*  
shall have their troubles multiplied.
- 4 Their libations of blood I will not offer, \*  
nor take the names of their gods upon my lips.
- 5 O LORD, you are my portion and my cup; \*  
it is you who uphold my lot.
- 6 My boundaries enclose a pleasant land; \*  
indeed, I have a goodly heritage.
- 7 I will bless the LORD who gives me counsel; \*  
my heart teaches me, night after night.
- 8 I have set the LORD always before me; \*  
because he is at my right hand I shall not fall.
- 9 My heart, therefore, is glad, and my spirit rejoices; \*  
my body also shall rest in hope.

10 For you will not abandon me to the grave, \*  
nor let your holy one see the Pit.

11 You will show me the path of life; \*  
in your presence there is fullness of joy,  
and in your right hand are pleasures for evermore.

**Galatians 5:1,13-25**

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by

the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

**Luke 9:51-62**

When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” But he turned and rebuked them. Then they went on to another village.

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to

him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Jesus said to him, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”



## SERMON

I'm going to shock you today. I hope I don't offend you,(actually, I'll leave that to Father Richard Rohr toward the end of the sermon) but I do intend to shock you. I'm going to take you with me to Galatia, to one of Paul's Gentile churches in Asia Minor, to see if we can contrast what was happening then with what is happening in our churches today. From our perspective 2,000 years later, we can easily lose sight of what a foreign and odd character Paul was to the people of Galatia. Suppose a Muslim arrived in Bellefonte and his words really spoke to a group of people here, so strongly that they gathered together for worship and study under his tutelage. How would the rest of the community view them? What kind of subtle and not-so-subtle pressure would they experience? This is not an ad for Islam.

What I want you to get is the flavor of how foreign and strange a person Paul would have seemed to the people he encountered. Some guy who dresses funny and eats funny and talks funny, someone who isn't like you or your friends, rolls up in town with a frankly outrageous story, says that he is spreading a new understanding and people follow him? I was born at night, but it wasn't last night. I have problems with that account.

To understand this, we need to get inside the skin of the people to whom Paul is writing, so, here's what I'd like for you to do. I want you to put yourself in the mindset of a Gentile citizen of the Roman province of Galatia, in what we now call Turkey. I want you to imagine yourself as such a citizen, but I do NOT want you to entertain a mental image of people in turbans and robes. I want you to imagine yourself, just as you are, among familiar people going about familiar tasks in

familiar places just as you have done every morning of your lives. “Normal” life is what we are aiming for here with all the comfortable and undisturbing things that go with normal life.

As you walk the streets in Galatia this morning, what is on your mind? Well, if you're like me, probably lunch, or the business of the day, or your family. What is probably NOT on your mind? I'd suggest that unless there's a festival or a public event requiring your attention you are probably NOT thinking about religion. For most people, for most of the time, there is family, business concerns, lunch, the normal things of normal life, and then there is religion. Never the twain shall meet, you might say.

Now, let's add something unusual to our normal day in Galatia. In the recent past, a Jew had come to town. Like all Jews, he was, well...peculiar. He had a strange

hair cut. He had about a zillion rules and laws he followed that kept him focused every minute of the day on his God, unlike your normal day. Unlike your normal day, he just couldn't get on with the day's business and set aside to a more convenient time thoughts about religion because he had to watch every footfall. Frankly, that would drive me nuts, and I'm sure it wouldn't work for you, either.

Anyway, this Jew, named Paul, came to town with a story about another Jew, named Jesus, who taught a new understanding of our relationship to the God of the Jews and each other. He was **crucified** by the Romans as a criminal, but then was raised from the dead by his God. I know! I know! It's unbelievable. It's crazy! But there was something about his words that touched me. I can't say how, they just touched me. I can't explain it. Something happened. A group of us who had similar

experiences -- now don't laugh -- but we got together and Paul spoke to us about bringing real change into the world by viewing ourselves as slaves to each other, approaching those around us not as adversaries but as brothers and sisters, and his words filled me with such peace. But there was still those zillion laws that the Jews follow. I don't want to become a Jew and I don't feel drawn to them as I do to the words of Paul about humility and service and submission to God. What am I to do?

After Paul left, we continued to meet, to discuss what he had told us, but we didn't talk about the elephant in the room -- all these laws. Then, we got a letter from Paul. Here's what he wrote to us:

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. For you were called to freedom, brothers

and sisters;

Paul is telling us that the nature of righteousness lies not in obedience to the zillion laws which bind him, but in a change of life that allows us to relate to the world and those within it in a new way. They were called, just as were you. Having been called to freedom, they must now take on the burden of responsibility which goes with that freedom.

... do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

In a scholarly essay, Dr. Paul Jones of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) argues that history has neutered Jesus by moving his kingdom from this world to heaven. The subversive Jesus who came to change the world has, for convenience sake, been converted to

the submissive Christ who rules in heaven, not here, and who does not intervene, he or His followers, in contemporary events, which are seen as "too political". The very existence of the Gentile churches Paul founded and spread screams opposition to the idea of an uninvolved God. The very existence of these churches stands irrefutably as evidence of God's action in the world as participant not audience. You are a called people, church, the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. You are the voice of the voiceless, the very presence of compassion and empathy in this world.

As the hands and feet of Jesus in the world, we cannot permit the church to become a comfortable resort from which we need not engage the sins which rack this world telling ourselves that it will all be well in the sweet bye and bye. This week we have all seen the photos of Oscar Alberto Ramirez and his 23 month old

daughter, Angie Valeria, face down in the water, her arm still around the neck of her dead father. I cannot tell you how that photo has racked my soul! Those who object to the church becoming "too political" would have us cluck our tongues sympathetically and send our thoughts and our prayers. The subversive Jesus would demand much more of us than that.

I said at the beginning that I was going to shock you, but that I didn't want to offend you. Coward that I am, I'm going to leave the task of offending you to Father Richard Rohr who told us:

**We worshiped Jesus instead of following him on his same path. We made Jesus into a mere religion instead of a journey toward union with God and everything else. This shift made us into a religion of 'belonging and believing' instead of a religion of transformation.**

Jesus calls you to be the voice of little Angie Valeria



which the world will never hear any longer. Do not stand for such wickedness, church. Speak!

AMEN

## BENEDICTION

Remember Highlights magazine for kids? They issued a statement condemning the conditions in the detention centers on the border. If Highlights magazine can do this, how can the church not do so?

The early church had no buildings, no money and no political influence and they turned the world upside down.<sup>1</sup> You are called to do no less.

The Lord bless you and keep you;  
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;  
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

---

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

The Bible texts of the Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel lessons are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian

<sup>1</sup> J.D. Greear

Education of the National Council of the Church of Christ in the USA, and used by permission.

The Collects, Psalms and Canticles are from the Book of Common Prayer, 1979.

Sermon Copyright 2019 J. Stewart Schneider