

Christ Church
"We are Kin"
26 Jul 2015
Sermon by Glo Wellman

Ephesians 3: 14-21 (NRSV)

¹⁴For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family [every ethnic group, every clan or tribe, every grouping imaginable] in heaven and on earth takes its name [and is recognized by God]. ¹⁶I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit,

¹⁷and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and **grounded in love**. ¹⁸I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰Now to [God] who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, ²¹to [God] be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

The Message

My response is to get down on my knees before the Father, this magnificent God who parcels out all heaven and earth. I ask that you be strengthened by God's Spirit—not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength—

and that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in. And I ask that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. **Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God.**

God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! [God] does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, [God's] Spirit deeply and gently within us.

Glory to God in the church!
Glory to God in Jesus!
Glory down all the generations!
Glory through all millennia! Oh, yes!

I could easily preach the news, this week and most weeks. There are the ever-present examples of

- relations between citizens and law enforcement
- individual struggles with homelessness - some are destroying their precious meager property and making it illegal to help them. There are also many examples of generous folks who tirelessly offer support.... like a policeman who sat down to eat with a homeless man.
- In international affairs - Who do we help and who do we ignore or actively battle?
- Education - To whom do we offer education? And who gets rejected? How much does it cost and what kind of debt will you be shackled with? Can well-educated folks actually find work?

There are so many examples of God's family struggling.... **and** there are many heart-warming examples of folks lending a hand, offering love and support.

Our world is changing. Seems like we have hit the tipping point in our acceptance of our LGBTQ brothers and sisters. I watched a video this week of an African American pastor who was preaching passionately to his congregation about full inclusion and love of our LGBTQ brothers and sisters. He was also cautioning the selective reading of the Bible.... not saying don't read selectively.... but be careful what you hold on to. Leviticus is one of the five books in the Torah, written in the 7th to 5th centuries BCE, and it is quoted by many as opposed to homosexual relations as it says that -

"If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death"

Leviticus also says, "If a man commits adultery with another man's wife – with the wife of his neighbor – both the adulterer and the adulteress are to be put to death."

It supports slavery with statements like - "Your male and female slaves are to come from the nations around you; from them you may buy slaves."

We are admonished - "Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed. "Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material." We are probably all committing a grievous sin by wearing mixed materials.... blends.... today.

And, as a penalty for the sins they have committed, God's people are told they must bring to the LORD a female lamb or goat from the flock as a sin offering; and the priest

shall make atonement for them for their sin. - When was the last time you brought a lamb or goat to church for a sin offering... because we have certainly all sinned by these biblical standards.

Leviticus also says we must offer -

"A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, [because it all] belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD." How many of us honor this in our giving back to others.... and therefore paying forward to God's children?

And like in other places in the bible, the writer of Leviticus warns us

"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself." I certainly with some of my Christian brothers and sisters would take this verse more to heart.... Love one another.

Dare I say, our Bible has stayed the same for more than 2000 years, and we have continued to learn and grow. Some of these instructions are not relevant or realistic today. But, no matter what the rules... the dos and don'ts.... We are bound to each other in community. The universal commandment that is integral to other faiths as well still stands. Love one another. We are all kin.

I turn again to one of my current favorite inspirations, Father Greg Boyle and his book, Tattoos on the Heart

He tells the story of Lencho -

I don't recognize Lencho when he steps into my office... He is two days fresh out of Corcoran State Prison [where he's] been locked up for ten years - a juvenile tried as an adult. Now twenty-four, his arms are "sleeved out" every inch covered with alarming tattoos. Most startling... are two exquisitely etched devil's horns planted on his forehead.

He says, "You know... I'm having a hard time finding a job."

I think, Well.... and I'm about to nudge him in the direction of our tattoo-removal clinic, when he says, "I've never had a a job in my life - been locked up since I was a kid."

I suggest that we change this. I tell him to begin work tomorrow, Tuesday at our Homeboy Silkscreen. On Wednesday, I called to check on [him], "How's it feel to be workin' man?"

"It feels proper," he says... and yesterday, after work, I'm sittin' at the back 'a the bus, dirty and tired, and, I mean, I just couldn't help myself. I keep turning to total strangers - "Just gettin' back, first day on the job.'

(And turning to another) “Just gettin’ off - my first day at work.”

He tells me this and I can’t help but imagine the people on the bus - half wondering if mothers are clutching their kids more closely. Surely someone is overhearing Lencho and thinking, “*Bien hecho* - nice goin’” I suspect it’s equally certain that someone catching Lencho’s outburst reflects inwardly, *What a waste of a perfectly good job*.

The wrong idea has taken root in the world. And the idea is this: there just might be lives out there that matter less than other lives... Lencho’s voice matters. To that end, we choose to become what Alice Miller calls “enlightened witnesses” - people who through their kindness, tenderness, and focused, attentive love return folks to themselves. It is a returning, not a measuring up. Lencho is returned to himself and announces this with clarion voice at the back of the bus.

Father G reminds us that

Mother Teresa diagnosed the world’s ills in this way: we’ve just “forgotten that we belong to each other.” Kinship is what happens to us when we refuse to let that happen. With kinship as the goal, other essential things fall into place; without it, no justice, no peace. I suspect that were kinship our goal, we would no longer be promoting justice—we would be celebrating it....

... [But too] often we strike the high moral distance that separates “us” from “them,” Yet it is God’s dream come true when we recognize that there exists no daylight between us. Serving others is good. It’s a start... But Kinship - not serving the other, but being one with the other. Jesus was not “a man for others”; he was one with them. There’s a world of difference in that.”

... [Through kinship, we inch ourselves closer to creating community... soon we imagine no one standing outside of that circle, moving ourselves closer to the margins so that the margins themselves will be erased. We stand there with those whose dignity has been denied. We locate ourselves with the poor and the powerless and the voiceless. At the edges, we join the easily despised and the readily left out. We stand with the demonized so that the demonizing will stop. We situate ourselves right next to the disposable so that the day will come when we stop throwing people away.... [In] Kinship is [the way God calls us to live.]

Lencho with his excitement and joy and tattoos.... we are kin.

The word “xeno” is sometimes used as a derogatory word; probably not one we’re familiar with. It is the Greek word for “foreigner” or “stranger.” It’s the source of our word “xenophobia”—which means an irrational aversion to people who are perceived to be different from us. In ancient times, to the Greeks everyone who was not Greek was a “xeno.” But that’s okay, because to the Jews everyone who was not Jewish was a “gentile dog.” And everyone who wasn’t a Roman was a barbarian. You get the idea: if you’re not one of us, then you’re less than us. While we may think we’re grown up and “advanced” in our modern times, we still too often cling to the “us” and “them” mentality. We see this often.... on the news... or even whenever we turn around.

We live in a world with too many dividing lines between us. Unfortunately, the Church has been a place where those dividing lines and hostilities have been reinforced. And sadly, it still is. Yet one of the fundamental principles of our faith and of other faiths is that we are all children of an inclusive God. We who are alienated and estranged, who may feel without hope and without God, Paul affirms that God’s shalom—God’s peace that brings new life— is given to all people, without exceptions. We are all strangers, xenos who have been taken in. We are all kin. (Allan Brehm)

Father G tells another story of Bandit... 15 years ago he was involved in all things illegal... recently he called and said, “You gotta bless my daughter.” Right away Father Greg worries that something has happened to her. And Bandit says she going to go to Humboldt College, “Imagine, my daughter goin’ to college.”

So Father G meets the family at the church the next day and blessed her and they all cry together... with pride and happiness. And on the way to the car, G turns to Bandit and says, “I give you credit for the man you’ve chosen to become. I’m proud of you.” “Yeah, I’m proud of myself. All my life, people called me a lowlife, a *bueno para nada*. I guess I showed ‘em.” I guess he did.... and the soul feels its worth.... We are kin. We get this. We feel with Bandit and his family.

I am going to take some liberties with Paul’s prayer in our scripture today. This is what this prayer said to me.

I get down on my knees in gratitude for a loving God.... You, O God who recognize all of us as your children... as your family.... every ethnic group, every clan and tribe, no matter what we have done or what we believe.... all of us your family. I ask God through the Holy Spirit to grant us strength in our inner beings and the ability to live with love in our hearts, a reflection of all that we have and all that we are. May this power of love give us a full measure of wisdom and courage to fully know you, God... the

breadth and length and height and depth of the fullness of your God-presence among us all. May you work within us and through us so that we might truly **be** your church.... and live as your loving family.

Indeed, we do need to be careful how we read scripture, what we focus on. What message do we need to hear? The Bible was written by many different people, many years ago. These were stories they wanted to tell that reflected the nature of God. People needed rules and guidelines about how to live in community. We need rules, too. But the most important one.... the rule that can change the world and shape the world and care for all God's children is "Love one another." Love.... We are kin!!