

*Exodus 4:10-17 (NRSV)*

<sup>10</sup>But Moses said to the LORD, “O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.” <sup>11</sup>Then the LORD said to him, “Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? <sup>12</sup>Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak.” <sup>13</sup>But he said, “O my Lord, please send someone else.” <sup>14</sup>Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, “What of your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently; even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart will be glad. <sup>15</sup>You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. <sup>16</sup>He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him. <sup>17</sup>Take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs.”

*Galatians 3:25-4:7 (The Message)*

<sup>25-27</sup>But now you have arrived at your destination: By faith in Christ you are in direct relationship with God. Your baptism in Christ was not just washing you up for a fresh start. It also involved dressing you in an adult faith wardrobe—Christ’s life, the fulfillment of God’s original promise.

<sup>28-29</sup>In Christ’s family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ. Also, since you are Christ’s family, then you are Abraham’s famous “descendant” heirs according to the covenant promises.

<sup>1-3</sup>Let me show you the implications of this. As long as the heir is a minor, he has no advantage over the slave. Though legally he owns the entire inheritance, he is subject to tutors and administrators until whatever date the father has set for emancipation. That is the way it is with us: When we were minors, we were just like slaves ordered around by simple instructions (the tutors and administrators of this world), with no say in the conduct of our own lives.

<sup>4-7</sup>But when the time arrived that was set by God the Father, God sent his Son, born among us of a woman, born under the conditions of the law so that he might redeem those of us who have been kidnapped by the law. Thus we have been set free to experience our rightful heritage. You can tell for sure that you are now fully adopted as his own children because God sent the Spirit of his Son into our lives crying out, “Papa! Father!” Doesn’t that privilege of intimate conversation with God make it plain that you are not a slave, but a child? And if you are a child, you’re also an heir, with complete access to the inheritance.

*“I can’t; I’ve tried; what’s the point.” “Yes, I know I need to change but you can’t teach old dogs new tricks.” “It’s just how I am.” . . .*

You’ve heard them all. All the reasons why we can’t do what we ought to do or even want to do. We embrace the language of limitation. We close down possibilities. We avoid risks. Instead of asking God, “What’s next?,” we inform God, “That’s it.”

But often, these are merely lies that we tell ourselves.

Now, I’m not foolish. I know that we can’t be or do anything we can dream. We all have differing gifts and talents that make us more suitable for some endeavors than for others. As a boy, no matter how much I might have wanted a career in professional baseball, I soon learned that hitting Nolan Ryan’s fastball was not in my future. I couldn’t even handle the fifth-grade phenom!

Further, this is not a study about the power of positive thinking or any of its ever-popular imitations. Yes, positive thinking matters, a lot. But God has something else to say to us. Indeed, it isn’t even something we could ever figure out on our own; instead, God has had to reveal it to us.

*Who me? . . . I can't!*

After killing an abusive Egyptian overseer, Moses escaped into the Sinai wilderness where he began to build a new life, a pastoral life far different from the palace life of his youth. One day, as Moses was shepherding his animals, he saw a bush that burned but was not consumed. When he went over to check it out, he met the LORD God. And there the LORD proceeded to lay out the mission he had for Moses. He is to go to Pharaoh and bring God's people out of Egypt (Exodus 3:1-12).

Moses' response to the Lord is understandable, but at least a bit surprising. "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh," Moses says. "Suppose they do not believe me? . . . I don't even speak well!" We sympathize with Moses. Who wouldn't be intimidated by such an assignment? Yet, who better than Moses? Didn't Moses realize that he was really the right man for the job. He was an Israelite, yes. But he had been raised in Pharaoh's household. If any Israelite could get an audience with Pharaoh it would be Moses. If anyone knew the ins and outs of palace politics, it was Moses. Who better?

But instead of trusting God's choice of him for this job, Moses listened instead to his own fears and doubts. He said, "I can't," when he should have said, "This is a surprise, but tell me, God, how do we proceed?" God said that he would be Moses' mouth. God would teach Moses what he needs to say. God even promises to send Aaron to speak for Moses. It is as if Moses doesn't really grasp the enormity of God's simple promise: "I will be with you" (Exodus 3:12).

#### *Heirs of the inheritance*

A similar problem is found in many of Paul's letters. These new Christians (after all, Christianity was all new at the time) don't really grasp the work that God has done in them. Paul urges them to remember the gifts that God bestowed on them, beginning with the Holy Spirit. As we discussed in the first week of this series, Paul's message to them is, "You are new creations; now act like it!"

In today's passage from Paul's letter to the Galatians, he uses the analogy of minors, heirs, and inheritance to make his point. *We are* in direct relationship with God. *We are* dressed in the adult wardrobe of faith. *We are* in Christ's family. *We are* the descendants of Abraham. *We are* the adult heirs of God and the inheritance due God's heirs is ours.

It is not that we are going to be heirs, we are heirs now. We may not act like God's heirs much of the time, but that is who we are. If I had to act like an heir to be an heir . . . well, let's just say that the inheritance would forever elude my grasp.

Paul's point in this passage is larger than just the true identity of the Galatian Christians, though he begins this chapter of the letter by reminding them of their own experience of God's Spirit, which is the evidence and guarantee of their new life in Christ. Nonetheless, many of them still look to the keeping of the Jewish law as the mark of their salvation. They don't fully realize that the arrival of Jesus Christ freed them from the curse of needing to keep a law that they could not keep. Because God gave them the Law, they know sin in a way that other peoples do not.

Paul desperately wants the Galatians to grasp that the Law was only their temporary custodian. In Christ, who was himself born under this temporary custodian so that he could free us from the custodian's care, we, in Peterson's graceful paraphrase, "experience our rightful heritage."<sup>1</sup> And our heritage is that we are new creations, made alive in Christ.

#### *Yes, we can*

As God's Spirit-filled heirs, we are empowered by God to work the works of the kingdom. We can accomplish far more for God than we imagine. And we are to accomplish it together. We are new creations bound together by God into a union that transcends all social divisions, whether of gender, race, education, or denomination. Together, our only response to God ought to be, "Yes, of course, . . . what's next?"

---

<sup>1</sup>I'm always reluctant to include a very long Scripture passage, such as today's from Galatians. But sometimes, bits and pieces don't really work. We need to hear all of Paul's argument as he uses an extended analogy to convey the meaning of our freedom in Christ and the Spirit as God's promised blessing. I suggest that you read all of Galatians 3:6-29 as one sustained argument. You might also read Richard Hays' commentary on this section in the *New Interpreters Bible*, the twelve-volume Bible commentary that can be found in the St. Andrew Library.

## Big Problems in Galatia!

In the mid-50's AD, some of the churches that Paul founded in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) were under attack from false teachers and he pulled no punches in responding. One of the biggest issues that faced the early church was the struggle between Jewish Christians and Gentile (non-Jewish) Christians. Because Christianity began as a movement within first-century Judaism, many Jewish-Christians believed that in order to become a Christian, a Gentile must live under the law of Israel. For male converts, this would mean circumcision. For all converts, this would mean keeping the Sabbath, obeying the Jewish dietary laws, and so on.

But in all his writings, Paul is clear that Christians are marked out *only* by their faith in Jesus Christ (see Romans 4). Paul taught that even the Old Testament heroes, such as Abraham, were reconciled to God by their faith – not by the works of the law. Further, Paul taught that this faith is received by God's grace alone and that it eliminates all traditional distinctions before God – “for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:26-29, NRSV). In the early church, Paul's teachings carried the day, and were endorsed in about 50AD by an important council of Christian leaders in Jerusalem. Christians could keep the Jewish law if they wished, but it was not to be required.

Evidently, false teachers had come to Galatia preaching that both faith in Jesus Christ *and* adherence to the law of Moses are needed to be reconciled with God. Paul is profoundly disappointed that these churches have succumbed to false teaching (yes, heresy!) and he is very combative in this letter. In contrast to Paul's letters to other churches, there is no general word of thanksgiving for the churches in Galatia. Instead, Paul quickly sets the stage for the rest of the letter – “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.” (Gal 1:6-7, NRSV)

## READING WITH HEART & MIND, JUNE 10 – 16

**Sunday, Galatians 1:1-10** This is the only one of Paul's letters in the New Testament that does not open with a word of thanks for the letter's recipients. Paul's Greek is not as polite as it comes across in the English translations. Why is he so angry with these Christians?

**Monday, Galatians 1:11-24** Why do you think Paul feels that he must defend his own apostleship? Why does he recount so much of his own story? What surprises you the most about the details of his story?

**Tuesday, Galatians 2** Read Acts 15 for more on this council meeting in Jerusalem, assuming Paul is describing the same meeting. It isn't hard to imagine multiple meetings over such a contentious issue. What is the nature of the dispute? Why is it so important that the leaders of the movement must meet to resolve it? Why does Paul get angry with Peter (Cephas)?

**Wednesday, Galatians 3** Paul now mounts his counter-arguments to the false teachers? How does Paul view the Law? What was its purpose? Do you think Paul means that with Christ, anything goes? How is it that you are one of Abraham's descendents? How would you explain this to another person?

**Thursday, Galatians 4** How does the story of Sarah and Hagar help us to understand Paul's point? How is it that Sarah's son is born “through the promise?” This passage illustrates that Scripture can sometimes be pretty hard to understand. How do you typically deal with a confusing passage?

**Friday, Galatians 5** We are new creations, free in Christ. But free for what? What is the nature of Christian freedom? What does this have to do with circumcision? Why do you think Paul contrasts the works of the “flesh” (our old self) with the works of the Spirit?

**Saturday, Galatians 6** What does Paul say here about how we are to live out the unity given us in Christ? Notice that in v. 11, Paul takes up the pen himself. Notice esp. v. 15. What does Paul mean?

## Sermon Notes

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Scott Engle's class, *Something More*, meets in Wesley Hall at 9:30 every Sunday.**

If you are not a part of a Sunday morning class, we hope that you'll visit our class. It is open to adults of all ages. Whether you are new to St. Andrew or just visiting, the class is a great way to begin getting connected. If you have questions, you are welcome to call Scott at 214-291-8009 or e-mail him at [sengle@standrewacademy.org](mailto:sengle@standrewacademy.org).

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

It can be very hard for us to grasp the enormity of God's work in us. In his commentary on Galatians in the *New Interpreters Bible*, Richard Hays writes:

“Our identity is given to us fundamentally through our union with Christ. Paul saw this union as figured forth and enacted in baptism. In baptism we “put on” Christ; we enter into union with him in such a way that all other markers of status and identity fall away into insignificance (Galatians 3:27-29). Centuries of the practice of infant baptism in the culture of Christendom have obscured the dramatic symbolism that the early Christians saw in baptismal initiation. In baptism, the person being baptized confessed the lordship of Jesus Christ over all creation, disrobed to signify the putting off of an entire way of life, was immersed below the water as if undergoing burial (Rom 6:3-5), was raised to a new life, and was clothed in new garments symbolizing the transformation that had occurred. Baptism was a symbolic participation in Christ's death and resurrection, and no one could undergo it without realizing that one life had ended and a new one had begun.”

We will and should continue to baptize infants, but how might we better grasp God's work of new creation? Are there any rituals or practices that would help? How would you help a newly-Christian friend to grasp the significance of her rebirth?

How does embracing our true identities, as God's Spirit-empowered new creations, help us to say “yes” to God, to take risks knowing that our work is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58)? How do we even know what God might be asking of us? Have you ever felt like God was asking something of you? Something pretty specific? How would you go about knowing it was God's voice, not your own? What do you think God would be asking of you right now, at this time in your life? Try to be specific.