

Sunday, June 19th, 2008
The 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

I Corinthians 1:17-31, Romans 8:31-38
The Gospel According to ...

If you've gone to your local Bible bookstore, or browsed the religion sections at Borders or Barnes and Noble lately, you may have noticed a rise in the publication of books whose title begins with "The Gospel According to." You can find such titles as According to Peanuts or According to the Simpsons, or even Starbucks. Even the books we refer to as the Gospels in Scripture are actually titled "The Gospel According to."

And if you've carefully read any or all of these books, you know that they do not agree 100% on the Gospel story. But neither do we as Christians. We each have a "Gospel according to" – and they are according to us. Otherwise there would be no need for denominations, for different churches at all, for theological squabbles or divisions, debates over marriage, or sexuality or poverty, or right liturgy or

Yet to be Christian there are some core doctrines, some essential tenets, as we Presbyterians are fond of referring to them, that cross the lines. There are, as hard as it may be to believe, certain things that we do agree on. And while I run a very definite risk of being pilloried for drawing two of those tenets from the writings of Paul, nonetheless, I think these two hold true.

The first comes from the first letter to the church at Corinth. We do proclaim Christ crucified. And this is a stumbling block to the wisdom of the world. Most of the world wants a super strong God, a super righteous God, a God who can not be hurt. And yet we gladly proclaim a God who dies. We proclaim a God who weeps outside the tomb of his friend Lazarus. We proclaim a God born in the middle of nowhere to unwed parents. We proclaim a God who is both human and divine. We proclaim a God who is betrayed and denied. We proclaim a God who dies and is risen.

And this is the core of our faith. While America happily gears up for Christmas in October, thinking that Christmas is a big deal, Christians wait. While we celebrate with joy the coming of the Christ child, we wait with hopeful expectation the crucifixion and resurrection. At no other time of the church year does the church ask its members to come to church 5 times in a week – other than Holy Week (Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Vigil, Easter Sunday). And so we wait with joyous expectation – not for the presents under the tree, but for the present who hung on the tree. And this is not what the world waits for.

For the world cannot understand why God would value us so highly as to pay such a high price for our sake. In a world driven by value, but the value of the dollar (ever declining), the value of energy, the value of people, the value of stuff, why would God value us to such an extent that the Son would need to die?

Once again, we turn to Paul for the answer. If God is for us, who can be against us? If God would do this impossible to consider thing of sending the Son,

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of coming God's self down to earth to live with us, to die for us, and to be raised for us, then what do we really have to worry about? God is the one who upholds us, God is the one who condemns us, God is the one who redeems us, God intercedes for us, and God justifies us.

So, why would God do all this for the people who constantly fall short of the mark? Why would God continue to work for our salvation when it is so obvious that at times we're not very interested in our own salvation? Why would God continue to want to be involved with us, when we have quite often said that we don't want to be involved with God?

And Paul answers, "It's love dummy!" There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God as expressed so clearly in Jesus Christ. It is not about our lives or our deaths, the powers in the world or the principalities. It is not about angels or rulers, or things that are here now or things that are yet to even exist. It is about the love of God in Jesus Christ. Correction, it is about God's love for us made real in Jesus Christ.

And on the most basic level – there's the Gospel. That's what ties Christians together. That Christ lived and died, really and truly died, and was raised. And that God loves us enough to send the Christ to die for us. And beyond that, there is nothing that God won't do out of love to save us, and there is nothing we can do to stop God's love, or to make God stop loving us.

Here's to the Good News that is the Gospel. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. But more than that, he loves me in spite of me. And more than that, I'm not the only one who can sing along, I'm not unique. Jesus loves you too. And that friends, is very good news.