

Paul: Life IN Christ
July 26, 2009

This morning we will conclude our series looking at the message of Paul. We will examine what Paul means by life IN CHRIST.

On my Facebook page I posed that question and the answers were quite interesting.

live with him in our hearts and in our minds and to reach out to him to influence our daily decisions and actions. To live with his love, joy and kindness within us each day. (so much easier to say than do)

Walk in his shoes.

All great answers, but what do they mean?

What does it mean to walk in Jesus shoes?

Do we all need to get sandals?

The problem with that answer is, depending on your point of view you might get very different answers

Conservative

Vs.

Liberal

But the question that we are trying to answer this morning is: What did Paul mean?

I actually gave you the answer two weeks ago – For Paul, living IN CHRIST means having a spiritual transplant.

Paul does not simply want to convert individuals

- Paul's goal was to create communities of spiritually transplanted persons who were living together IN CHRIST.

When Paul says IN CHRIST he is talking about:

- A new personal identity
- A new orientation toward life

Spiritual transplant for short!

Now I am not talking about personal piety

Absolutely personal transformation was critical

BUT, life IN CHRIST was always a communal matter

Paul's purpose

Paul's passion

Was to create communities whose life together embodies an alternative to the normalcy of the – as Paul called it – the “wisdom of this world.”

Over 100 times the genuine Paul uses the phrase: IN CHRIST

That phrase was interchangeable with another phrase that Paul often used “in the Spirit”

Paul's communities IN CHRIST were communities “in the Spirit,” grounded in the Spirit of God as known in Jesus.

Paul talks not only of the “Spirit of Christ” but also the “body of Christ.”

Christians communities were “the body of Christ” animated by the “Spirit of Christ.” Their identity and their life together “in the body” were grounded in Christ, in the Spirit, in the Spirit of God known in Christ, and not in “this world.” (Borg & Crossan, The First Paul, p. 187)

More than 50 times the genuine Paul uses another phrase to address his communities: “brothers”.

Modern translators often translate the Greek word {adelphos} as ‘brothers and sisters’ recognizing that Paul was following the convention of his day in using that male term to refer to siblings.

The reason that Paul used that term was because it represented to him “new family” language.

The use of new family language implies that members of the community have the same obligations to each other as biological brothers and sisters do. (Borg & Crossan p 187)

Paul believed that the new age that Jesus spoke of had already begun.

God's dream for the world had begun in Christ.

God's great cleanup of the world had begun – and Paul's communities were a part of this “new creation – of the way the world was meant to be.

Paul writes in Corinthians:

(2 Corinthians 5:17 NRSV) So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

What are these new communities to look like?

Paul saw them as share Communities

- Not like the communities that Acts talks about in which they sold everything and lived in common, but communities that shared

Why do I believe that they were share communities?

In Paul's world many people lived on the edge – they were barely surviving on their meager wages.

Paul saw the people in his communities taking care of each other

If someone couldn't work for a time – others would take care of them
If you got sick or if you lost your job for a variety of reasons the risk to you and your family was great

Flood experience

The language of “new family” implies that the members of Paul's community had the same obligations to each other as did members of a biological family.

This same language continues today in our baptismal ceremony

Which takes us nicely to the question that Paul had to battle with the conservative party of the early Christian movement

- Does a person have to be circumcised to be a part of this “new family”?

This was the burning issue between Paul and James

We have a similar question that brews in the church today

- Does someone have to be baptized to be a part of the family?

For Paul the answer to the circumcision question was a resounding NO
Gentiles did not first need to become Jewish before they could become a follower of Jesus.

This argument plays out in Galatians – if you wish to examine this issue more closely I would suggest that you read and study this letter.

It is summed up in Galatians 3

(Galatians 3:26–29 NRSV) for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. {27} As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. {28} 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. {29} And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

In the new creation of Christ – which Paul believed was already underway – those divisions were gone.

Equality was the hallmark of this new creation to Paul.

We see what life IN CHRIST was like in a number of places in the genuine letters of Paul – I want to look at just a few of them.

First, in Corinth we see what life IN CHRIST was like by looking at the issue of rich and poor.

Corinth was the only city in which Paul's communities contained significant class divisions between the wealthy and the powerful and ordinary people. The division is named in the letter: "Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many of noble birth" (1 Cor 1:26). To say "not many" also indicates that some were. (Borg & Crossan p 197)

This presence of wealthy and powerful people in the Christian community in Corinth is the context of many of the issues in the two letters.

I want to look at one issue specifically because it relates to what life IN CHRIST is to be like.

This was about the way the Lord's Supper was being observed in Corinth.

Back then it was a real meal

A share meal → we might call it a pot luck supper today

It was not just a tiny sliver of bread and a sip of wine (grape juice)

The meal began with breaking of bread

And then after the supper they passed and shared in the cup

But that is not what was happening!

The wealthy were eating all the food, and drinking all the wine before the day laborers even got off work

The issue here is that not everybody got to eat the same food. The wealthy had their own food and drink, and others had little or nothing. This practice was common in the Roman world when a wealthy patron hosted a meal that included people from lower social classes. The patron would serve finer food and wine to others from his social rank and less fine food and wine to those of lower rank. Meals, even when they crossed social boundaries, would nevertheless mirror those boundaries. (Borg & Crossan p 199)

What was happening at Corinth with the Lord's Supper was that it was still reflecting the social hierarchy and inequality of the world – and not the new creation of living IN CHRIST.

The second issues has to do with Spiritual gifts – the topic of chapters 12, 13 and 14 in 1st Corinthians.

There was a dispute over which gifts were the most important – You need to take some time and really read these three chapters.

Paul says that there is no hierarchy of spiritual gifts.

Paul writes:

(1 Corinthians 12:4–7 NRSV) Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; {5} and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; {6} and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. {7} To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

But he ends chapter 12 with these words:

(1 Corinthians 12:31 NRSV) But strive for the greater gifts. **And I will show you a still more excellent way.**

We all know the next passage

It is often read at weddings or funerals

But Paul is not talking about love between a man and a woman (as important as that is) in this passage

Paul sees this love as a Spiritual gift – and this love is the most important result (and even the evidence) of a spiritual transplant.

Life IN CHRIST is defined by love

Which means for Paul – the things we have talked about during this series

- Distributive justice
- Nonviolence
- Bread
- Peace

Paul’s vision of life “in Christ,” life in the “new creation,” did not mean, “Accept the imperial way of life with its oppression and violence, but practice love in your personal relationships.” (Borg & Crossan p 204)

People like Jesus and Paul were not executed for saying, “Love one another.” They were killed because their understanding of love meant more than being compassionate toward individuals, although it did include that. It also meant standing against the domination systems that ruled their world, and collaborating with the Spirit in the creation of a new way of life that stood in contrast to the normalcy of the wisdom of this world. Love and justice go together, justice without love can be brutal, and love without justice can be banal. Love is the heart of justice, and justice is the social form of love. (Borg & Crossan p 205)

Our scripture passage this morning is really the defining passage of scripture on what life IN CHRIST is like to Paul.

(Philippians 2:1-5 NRSV) If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, {2} make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. {3} Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. {4} Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. {5} Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

Paul is saying -- -- It's not about you!

When you give to missions

Do you: Ask what's in it for me?

How much is this going to cost me?

Do you give your leftovers?

If that is true, Paul would say that the spiritual transplant is not complete.

Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan conclude their book: The First Paul with these words.

What we see in Jesus - Christ crucified and raised as "Jesus Christ the Lord" - is the way, the path. This, Paul says in this text is the mind that followers of Jesus are to have. What we see in Jesus is the way, the path, of personal transformation. And it is the way, the path, of advocacy of a way of life very different from and in opposition to the normalcy of "this world." And it would cost Paul his life. (Borg & Crossan p 213)