

Daryl Bohac
Worship Message
06/02/24

GOOD MORNING! SO GLAD TO BE WITH YOU THIS MORNING. I BRING GREETINGS FROM PASTOR KRIS WHO AS YOU KNOW IS ATTENDING THE NEBRASKA SYNOD ASSEMBLY IN KEARNY THIS WEEKEND.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE BRINGS US BACK TO SAUL WHO WAS PAUL. AS A REMINDER, SAUL IS A JEWISH NAME WHILE PAUL IS A GREEK NAME. SO WHEN PAUL WAS SAUL AND PERSECUTING CHRISTAINS, HE CERTAINLY COULDN'T BE A PAUL COULD HE? AND WHEN HE BECOME A DISCIPILE OF CHRIST AND WAS SEEKING OUT THE GENTILES AND GREEKS, HE CERTAINLY COULDN'T BE A SAUL, COULD HE? SO SAUL IS PAUL AND PAUL IS SAUL. SO GLAD WE COULD GET THAT STRAIGHT! AND AS FAR AS I CAN TELL ITS ABOUT MARKETING. JEWS RELATE TO THE NAME SAUL, GENTILES RELATE TO THE NAME PAUL. KIND OF LIKE SAUL INCORPORATED LATER DOING BUSINESS AS PAUL. HOWEVER, WHEN I SHARED THAT THOUGHT WITH PASTOR KRIS, SHE LOOKED RATHER STUNNED BY MY LOGIC AND QUICKLY REMINDED ME THAT MOST JEWS HAD TWO NAMES IN THE TIME OF PAUL, ONE HEBREW, THE OTHER LATIN OR GREEK, AND WENT ON TO ASSERT THAT THERE ARE ACTULLY THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHANGE FROM SAUL TO PAUL!

SO LETS TAKE SOME TIME EXPLORE THE CONTEXT OF PAUL'S ROLE IN SPREADING THE WORD ABOUT CHRISTIANITY. HE IS IN THE SECOND GENERATION OF DISCIPLES AND COMES AFTER PETER WHO YOU REMEMBER AS THE APOSTLE WHO DENIED CHRIST THREE TIMES BEFORE THE COCK CROWED.

PETER KNEW JESUS PERSONALLY AND HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS PERHAPS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT APOSTLES OF HIS GENERATION AS HE BECOME THE EARTHLY LEADER OF THE CHURCH FOLLOWING THE CRUCIFIXITION, DEATH AND RESSURECTION OF CHRIST.

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PAUL, UNLIKE PETER DID NOT HAVE ANY DIRECT EXPERIENCE WITH JESUS' EARTHLY MINISTRY. SAUL, WHO IS PAUL, WAS A PHARISEE WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE PERSECUTION OF THE EARLY DISCIPLES OF JESUS. BUT HE IS CONVERTED ON THE ROAD TO DAMSCUS FOLLOWING HIS ENCOUNTER WITH THE RISEN CHRIST, ESTIMATED TO HAVE OCCURRED 4-7 YEARS AFTER JESUS' DEATH AND RESURRECTION. AND THEN THREE DAYS OF BLINDNESS AND THEN BEING HEALED, HE THEN BECOMES A DISCIPLE OF CHRISTIANITY.

IF YOU RECALL, MANY PEOPLE IN THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD WORSHIPED MANY GODS NOT JUST ONE GOD AND THEIR STYLE OF WORSHIP IS OFTEN REFERRED TO AS POLYTHEISTIC PAGANISM. THEY WORSHIPPED AS MANY AS 12 GODS REPRESENTING VARIOUS INTERESTS SUCH AS LOVE, WAR, TRADE AND TRAVEL, HUNTING, ETC. IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT ROMAN EMPORERS WERE VIEWED AS DEVINE AND AT LEAST ONE CLAIMED TO BE A GOD HIMSELF.

SO HERE IS PAUL SPREADING THE GOOD NEWS, TRYING TO CONVINCED JEW, GENTILE, ROMANS, GREEKS AND MANY OTHERS OF THE GOOD NEWS. AND AS WE CAN SEE IN THE READING FROM ACTS TODAY, WHILE HE AND SILAS WERE HAVING SUCCESS, THEY CLEARLY CAUSED OTHERS TO BE UPSET. JEWS AND RUFFIANS FROM THE MARKET PLACE JOINING TOGETHER TO FORM A MOB AND SET THE CITY OF THESSALONICA IN AN UPROAR.

WHY BE UPSET? APPARENTLY THERE WERE NO DEMANDS INITIALLY THAT ONE HAD TO GIVE UP THEIR OTHER GODS IN ORDER TO FOLLOW JESUS AND CHRISTIANITY. I OFFER THAT FOR SOME, ANY THREAT TO THE STATUS QUO IS ENOUGH. IMAGINE, IF YOU WILL, THAT YOU ARE THIS GENTILE WHO HAS BEEN MAKING SACRIFICES TO THE ROMAN GODS AND YOUR LIFE HAS BEEN REASONABLY GOOD, AND THEN ALONG COMES PAUL AND HIS

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FELLOW DISCIPLES WHO ARE INTRODUCING JEWS AND GENTILES ALIKE TO JESUS, WHO DOES NOT EXPECT SACRIFICES, BUT WHEN ASKED:

“TEACHER, WHICH IS THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT IN THE LAW?”

HE REPLIED: “ 'LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND. ' THIS IS THE FIRST AND GREATEST COMMANDMENT. AND THE SECOND IS LIKE IT: 'LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.

WHAT? – NO MORE SACRIFICING TO 12 GODS. JUST LOVE EACH OTHER, LOVE YOUR GOD! RADICAL!

AND FOR THE JEWS? WELL THE TEACHINGS OF CHRIST ARE IN SOME VERY REAL WAYS REJECTING THE LAWS OF JUDAISM. ACCORDING TO HISTORY PROFESSOR EDWARD WATTS, MISSIONARIES LIKE PAUL PREACHED THAT A PERSON DID NOT HAVE TO OBEY JEWISH LAWS AROUND CIRCUMCISION AND KOSHER FOOD PRACTICES TO BECOME A CHRISTAIN. HE NOTES THAT, “IF YOU ARE A MALE WHO WANTS TO CONVERT TO CHRISTIANITY, AND THERE’S AN ASSUMPTION THAT FIRST YOU HAVE TO CONVERT TO JUDAISM, IT’S LITERALLY PHYSICALLY PAINFUL AND DANGEROUS FOR YOU TO CONVERT.”

BUT PAUL AND HIS FELLOW DISCIPLES ARE DECLARING THAT THE CHRISTAIN CHURCH IS FOR ANYONE. THERE ARE NO EXCLUSIONARY CLAUSES – ITS INCLUSIONARY. YOU DON’T HAVE TO LOOK LIKE ME. YOU DON’T HAVE TO TALK LIKE ME. YOU CAN COME FROM ANY WALK OF LIFE. THERE IS NO ADMISSION FEE. JUST LOVE THE LORD AND YOUR NEIGHBOR.

PROFESSOR WATTS ALSO NOTED THAT THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY WASN’T DUE TO JUST THE NAMED DISCIPLES. HE WRITES, “MISSIONARIES ARE A PART OF THE STORY, BUT MOST OF

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THE STORY IS ABOUT REGULAR CHRISTIANS TALKING TO REGULAR PEOPLE," HE SAYS. "AND THAT, I THINK, IS THE MOST IMPORTANT REASON THAT CHRISTIANITY EMERGES IN THE WAY THAT IT DOES IN THE ROMAN WORLD. IT'S NOT MISSION ACTIVITY BY PEOPLE LIKE PAUL SO MUCH AS IT IS PEOPLE WHOSE NAME WE DON'T KNOW."

WELL, ISNT THAT THE TAKE HOME MESSAGE TODAY. A MESSAGE THAT FOCUSES ON INCLUSION. A SHARING OF OUR OWN STORIES OF FAITH WITH OTHERS IN A GENUINE, RESPECTFUL, EMPATHIC, AND WARM MANNER. IN A WAY THAT DOESN'T DEMAND CONVERSION, BUT RATHER INVITES OUR NEIGHBOR TO JOIN THE JOURNEY WITH US. NEIGHBOR LOVING NEIGHBORS FOR WHO THEY ARE, NEIGHBORS INVITING OTHERS TO COME AS YOU ARE. JUST MAYBE IF THAT OCCURRED ON THE STREET CORNERS OF OUR COMMUNITIES, IN THE HALLWAYS OF OUR LIVES, WE WOULD FIND LESS DIVISIVENESS, LESS RANCOR, LESS ISOLATION AND MARGINALIZATION OF THOSE UNLIKE US, AND JUST MAYBE MORE LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER.

AMEN,