

First Presbyterian Church  
Bozeman, Montana  
Dan Krebill, co-pastor

June 23, 2019  
*12<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time*  
Galatians 3:23-29

### **All are God's Children**

For those who came of age in this country in the middle and latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—most of us in this room today—our awareness of the world around us grew and expanded as both transportation efficiency and communication technologies grew and improved.

Think back to the early 1970s for those who remember and for those younger who might have studied that time period. In the early 70s air travel was heavily regulated meaning that airfares were very high thereby limiting air travel to business people, and the wealthy leisure class. International travel was especially pricey, limiting direct exposure to and experience of other cultures to travel films and documentaries as well as occasional opportunities to meet international visitors.

In the communication realm when it came to telephones—yes, they were called telephones back then—they too were heavily regulated meaning that the price of phone calls, particularly long-distance calls—was so high that those calls were made only occasionally. Again, businesses and the wealthy were not all that affected, but most people had to think twice about making such calls, and then when they were made, the calls were carefully time-limited and placed late at night when calling rates were lower.

When it came to television, there were 3 major broadcast networks with a handful or two of cable channels available for those who paid for them. Local, national and international news came in basically one of two ways: print media like newspapers and magazines, and broadcast media news on television and radio.

There was no internet, meaning there was no email, instant messaging or social media. There was no wikipedia or other such sources of knowledge and information. Encyclopedias—that is a printed and bound set of books—and libraries served as the sources of knowledge and information.

I point to the 1970s because that was roughly 50 years ago—a nice round number. I also point to them because while it is 50 years ago, it is not yet ancient history for most of us. And I point to the 70s because it was later in that decade that big changes and developments began to take place leading to the major expansion of both transportation and communication technologies that have resulted in where we are today with widely available international travel and worldwide communication available with a click or two.

In the late part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as these communication and travel opportunities were expanding, there was a general sense of excitement and optimism in our nation. While the turmoil of the civil rights movement, the environmental movement, the peace movement, the space race, and the equal rights movement, along with other cultural and societal changes were underway, this general excitement and optimism continued to grow as we moved through the last decades of that century and into the new millennium of the 2000s.

Churches like our own Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) rode this wave of optimism and sought to contribute to it. One of the songs that grew in popularity and captured this positive energy was “Jesus Loves the Little Children.” Do you remember it?

Jesus loves the little children  
All the children of the world

Red and yellow, black, brown, white  
They are precious in His sight  
Jesus loves the little children of the world

(Lyrics by Donna J. Krieger / George F. Root © Warner/Chappell Music, Inc, Universal Music Publishing Group, Music Services, Inc.)

I remember singing that song as I just sang it after the word brown was added to the spectrum of colors, a reminder that there is no distinction in who God loves. It was a simple song, and yet conveyed a powerful message.

Another song that took on increased popularity around this same time was, "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands." You remember this one too, don't you?

He's got the whole world in His hands (4x)

One of the fun things we did as we sang that song was to think of every category of people and animals possible to add to the song:

He's got the fish of the sea in His hands  
He's got the birds of the air in His hands  
He's got the gamblin' man in His hands  
He's got the little bitsy baby in His hands  
He's got the whole world in His hands  
He's got you and me, brother, in His hands  
He's got you and me, sister, in His hands  
He's got everybody here in His hands

(Lyrics by Geoffrey Love © Warner/Chappell Music, Inc.)

But it wasn't just Christian churches that were singing these songs. Jumping on the bandwagon of inclusivity and equality were such major multinational corporations like Coca-cola. Remember how Coke pirated the song, "I'd like to teach the world to sing"?

I'd like to teach the world to sing  
In perfect harmony  
I'd like to hold it in my arms  
And keep it company  
I'd like to see the world for once  
All standing hand in hand  
And hear them echo through the hills  
For peace through out the land  
(That's the song I hear)

(Lyrics by William M Backer / Roger F. Cook / Roquel Davis / Roger Greenaway © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC)

Okay, I promise that's the last song for today. I bring these songs back to the foreground today because they are a wonderful snapshot of what was. And because sadly, even tragically, they have fallen out of fashion today.

Now I don't doubt for a second that anyone here today would disagree with the sentiment expressed in those songs of hope and optimism. But what has happened in our world today that we no longer sing them hand in hand and with joy in the wider culture?

Partly to blame perhaps is the increasing secularization of the culture around us. Songs that mention Jesus and God just aren't part of the mainstream anymore. I get that, and as I've said from this pulpit many times before, I don't bemoan that secularization. What I do wonder though is why we as people who know and celebrate God's amazing all-inclusive love are not more noisy about it.

In the earliest days of the Christian church, this message of God's love for all is one that had to be repeated over and over again. That this was a challenge for the apostle Paul 2000 years ago is perhaps testimony to our human tendencies to divide and separate and demarcate. This call to move beyond such distinctions can be found in multiple places in Paul's writings. It is in his letter to the Galatians where he drives this point home as sharply as he does anywhere. There simply isn't a more eloquent expression of this truth in all of scripture. "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." (Gal. 3:26-28)

In these three contrasting pairs—Jew or Greek; slave or free; male and female—Paul is covering the waterfront. There is no meaningful distinction. We know this. We have heard this before. It's time for us to once again double down and begin singing this song again.

Baptist pastor Carol E. Holtz-Martin puts these words of scripture into our contemporary setting when she writes, "In the midst of complex immigration controversies, 'There is neither native born nor illegal immigrant.' In a society dramatically divided by income, 'There is neither monied nor working class nor poor.' In a society polarized by race, 'There are neither people of color nor people of no color.' In the season of elections, 'There is neither Republican nor Democrat nor Independent. . . .' And, to repeat Paul's own words: 'There is neither male nor female.' For you are all one in Christ!" (*Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Vol. 3, David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., © 2010 Westminster John Knox Press, p. 165) We know this. We have heard this before. It's time for us to once again double down and begin singing this song again.

As God's children we have a responsibility to sing this song and proclaim this truth and to stand up to the powers and forces working against this truth of God's inclusive love.

You know this. I know you know this.

Let me make one more reminder about all of this good stuff. It's also something that we know already, but let me remind us of it. To say that we are all God's children without distinction does not mean that we are all alike. Think of it this way. We're all in the choir together singing this good song. Some are basses with the lowest notes. Some are sopranos with the highest notes. And with all those notes in between, some are baritones, mezzo-sopranos, tenors and altos. We're all wearing the same choir robes and we're all singing the same song, made more beautiful than ever when sung in beautiful harmony.

Or think of it this way. We're all on the same sports team playing together to live out God's message as we work our way up and down the field. Some are defensive players and some are offensive players. Others are on call for special situations. We're all wearing the same uniform and we're playing much more effectively when we play in coordination with the others on our team.

This is what Paul is talking about when he says that we have clothed ourselves with Christ. (Gal. 3:27)

My friends, in the year 2019 it's time that we start singing this song again. It's a song with a message that is sorely needed in these fractured and divided times. We may never get the whole culture to join in and sing along with us. But if we start singing again there will be those who will hear an alternative to what is blaring at us from so many places. And if we start singing again the songs that we know so well and that we used to sing so boldly, there are surely those out there who will hear them and be reminded that they used to sing the songs too. And when they join us in the singing, the message will travel and grow and gain traction.

Okay now I know I told you I was done singing. But please forgive me, I just can't resist singing one more that was sung from this pulpit earlier this year when we began a sharp focus on Learning and Living God's Love Together. It's another of those we used to sing and that we can and need to sing again.

What the world needs now is love, sweet love  
It's the only thing that there's just too little of  
What the world needs now is love, sweet love,  
No not just for some but for everyone.

(lyrics by Burt F. Bacharach / Hal David © Warner/Chappell Music, Inc.)