

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 7th Sunday After Pentecost, July 3, 2016

Pride and Prejudice
Dr. Kenneth Humphreys
July 3, 2016

Galatians 6:1-16 Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Tomorrow is Independence Day, a day of celebration and pride for our great country. It is a day of family gatherings, picnics, parades, fireworks, and more. It is appropriate that we should be proud of our country but, in that pride, we need to remember that we are a country of immigrants. Not one of us can claim that our heritage began here. We are all descended from people who came here as immigrants. We should be proud of that but, at the same time, we need to avoid prejudice against those who have more recently come, or seek to come, to the United States from another country. That is something many Americans have forgotten, particularly now in the height of a very contentious Presidential campaign.

It is easy to be proud of what we have and of our family background. We should be proud. Diverse people from all over the world built this country and that diversity is indeed something to be proud about, and we should be welcoming to those who come here, or want to come here, seeking a better life. We should not be prejudiced against them.

Two weeks ago I talked about not looking back but instead to look forward. That is what this country needs to do.

Jesus' disciples had little love for Samaritans and when they were refused hospitality, they wanted to burn down the Samaritan village. They were incensed by "those people" and were strongly prejudiced against them, but they were given hospitality in another nearby village which presumably was also Samaritan.

We read in Galatians, "*A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please the flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit will reap eternal life.*"

In the words of William Barclay ⁽¹⁾, "*... the danger of those who are really trying to live the Christian life is that they are apt to judge the sins of others hardly.*" That is what the disciples did concerning the Samaritans. They let their prejudices control their

thoughts.

Paul reminds the people of Galatia that they are not perfect. They are prejudiced and are excessively proud of their Jewish heritage. They show that pride in wanting the Gentile Christians to be circumcised but Paul admonishes them to accept anyone who seeks Christ, Jewish or not. He is telling them to put aside both their pride and their prejudice.

In our reading from Luke, Jesus sends out seventy or seventy-two disciples, depending upon which Bible translation you read, to the many villages and towns to which he himself desired to go but was not able to do so.

He tells them to go in pairs and to accept any hospitality which is offered to them. If they are refused hospitality, they are not to show prejudice but to depart reminding the people that the kingdom of God had come near to them, to tell them what they had missed by not offering hospitality, but not to show prejudice to them.

Pride however overtook the disciples. Their journeys were fruitful and they returned joyfully bragging about their success, saying, *“Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.”* Their pride overflowed and Jesus stopped them short saying, *“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”* Satan fell because of the sin of pride.

Jesus went on to say, *“I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”*

According to the Zondervan Bible Backgrounds Commentary⁽²⁾ snakes and scorpions were symbols of extreme danger in Judaism. Trampling of them is evidence of divine protection (Psalm 91:13) and our text seems to suggest victory over natural dangers, as symbolized by snakes and scorpions, and spiritual ones, the enemy --- Satan.

The disciples were showing extreme pride at their successes but they were ignoring the fact that, without Christ, they never would have been successful --- the power and authority came from Jesus not from anything within their ordinary ability. Their pride was not justified --- although I don't blame them for being prejudiced against snakes, scorpions and Satan.

Paul's words in our reading from Galatians, *“... form a stark reminder to us that*

our choices have consequence --- and that includes how we treat others. When we choose to hate, that hate can return to us in the form of consequences we can never fully prepare for, We can find ourselves alienated from others, angry with ourselves, and hamstrung in our ability to serve Christ effectively.” (Our Daily Bread, December 28, 2011).

“Paul used the illustration of sowing and reaping because he knew that doing good can be tiring. He wrote, ‘Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.’ It is difficult to love our enemies, discipline our children, or pray without ceasing. However, reaping the good we have sown isn’t tedious! What a joy when we do get to see love conquering strife, or children following God’s ways, or answer to prayer.” (Our Daily Bread, June 12, 2015).

Prejudice is something that is totally contrary to what it means to be a Christian. It is totally opposite and contrary to Christ’s admonition to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Pride however is not a problem at all, provided that the pride is not misplaced. We should be proud of our country and be proud of doing those things that Christ has charged us to do. But we need to avoid excessive pride. The disciples were excessively proud of their successes on their missionary journeys. They forgot the sources of their successes --- Jesus.

Similarly we need to remember that our national pride and success is due to our heritage of welcoming strangers into our country, not by excluding them.

Jesus wants us to be welcoming. Can we do that?

Amen.

1. William Barclay, The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians rev. ed., Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1975.
2. Clinton E. Arnold, ed., Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary, Vol. 1, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI., 2002

Note: Scripture quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible, 2011