

**IV LENT 2014**  
**SERMON - CHRIST CHURCH PARISH**  
**FATHER CRAIG LOONEY**  
**GALATIANS 4.21**

✠

Saint Paul was a man who minced no words...whether he was writing to those Corinthians...or in the case of today's Epistle...those Galatians.

Galatia was a Roman province in central Asia Minor...present-day Turkey...that had been settled by immigrant Celts some 300 years earlier. Paul was the missionary bishop who founded a number of parishes in Galatia early in his ministry. Most of the converts in those parishes came from pagan backgrounds. They were happy to hear the Good News about Jesus, about being set free from sin, and about belonging to God's People.

After Paul left Galatia, some Jewish converts in the churches starting teaching that in order for converts to become one of God's People they must first keep the Jewish Law. Paul saw this as false teaching...preaching a "different Gospel", and he wasted no time in writing to the Galatians:

*"You foolish Galatians! Who put a spell on you? Before your very eyes you had a clear description of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross! Tell me this one thing: did you receive God's Spirit by doing what the Law requires or by hearing the gospel and believing it? How can you be so foolish!"*

The non-Jewish converts were being excluded from full participation in the life of the Church because of some parishioners who thought they were special and had an exclusive right to determine who and how a person was saved. Paul tells the entire Church Community they are all called to be God's People and it didn't matter if they came from Jewish or pagan backgrounds. Any words or behavior not born out of unconditional love for each other was just plain dumb!

The allegorical story Paul uses in today's Epistle reading to make his point about how we are called to be God's People is lost on 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians even in a more modern translation of the Bible such as the Good News. What we should try to get out of the story is that just as God kept his promise to Abraham and Sarah when Isaac was born, he kept his promise to us and has set us free from sin and death through the life, work, death and Resurrection of his Son, Jesus.

Because we are God's People, we are called to hear the Good News about Jesus and to believe it with all our heart, mind and soul. We hear the Good News about Jesus in Church, which Saint Paul calls Jerusalem on Earth in his Letter to the Galatians. It is in hearing and believing the Good News in Church we begin to experience the freedom Saint Paul talks about.

The Church is where and how we experience heaven in the here and now...at this very moment. We may quite properly call the Church our Mother. Mothers nurture and guide us and keep us out of harms way. It's the job of all of us in the Church to point the way to what Saint Paul calls our true mother, the heavenly Jerusalem. It's the job of the Church to make certain everyone hears the Good News and no one gets left behind because of their family tree. No one is excluded, unless they want to be excluded.

Bishop McClean reminded us in his sermon at last Wednesday's Evensong and Confirmation that Evangelism...spreading the Good News about Jesus...is the responsibility of every member of the Church...lay people and clergy alike. The Galatians applied their own interpretation of what they thought the Church Community should include. Excluding people they didn't like and living in the past left the Galatians in a state of spiritual slavery.

All of Paul's letters were written with the single purpose of reinforcing the Good News about being put right with God through Jesus. He also writes letters to the various churches to commend them for doing good works, and in the case of the Galatians, to correct certain bad teaching and bad behavior. Paul called the Galatians "foolish", but he didn't write to them just to scold them...he offers a solution to get them back on track.

The greatest challenge our parish faces today is the future. We cannot live in the past and wish for the way things were. We must take seriously Bishop McClean's instructions to go out and spread the Good News about Jesus and invite others to become part of our parish community...we cannot exclude anyone because we want things to stay the same.

Freedom, Saint Paul tells us, is what we already have. And because Jesus has set us free, we need to stand up like free people...and not become slaves to sin, slaves to the past, or slaves to ourselves!

✠