

## May 1

### 2 Corinthians 7:2-13a

Make room in your hearts for us;  
we have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one,  
we have taken advantage of no one.

\* Paul continues with making his case. Why? Why do we?

I do not say this to condemn you; you are in our hearts,  
to die together and to live together.  
I often boast about you; I have great pride in you;  
I am filled with consolation; I am overjoyed in all our affliction.  
When we came to Macedonia our bodies had no rest,  
but we were afflicted in every way—disputes without and fears within.

Even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it  
(though I did regret it, for I see that I grieved you, but only briefly).  
Now I rejoice, not because you were grieved,  
but because your grief led to repentance;  
for you felt a godly grief,  
so that you were not harmed in any way by us.  
For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation  
and brings not regret, but worldly grief produces death.

\* Reflect on a congregational situation that this passage brings to mind. What were (are) the complexities? The eagerness for people to clear themselves? The grief? The indignation? The repentance?

Although I wrote to you, it was not on account  
of the one who did the wrong,  
nor on account of the one who was wronged,  
but in order that your zeal for us  
might be made known to you before God. In this we find comfort.

*God who creates community, we confess the ways in which we have harmed one another. We know that we both die together and live together. In the midst of the most grievous situations, free us by the cross to repent and give us new life in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

## May 2

### 2 Corinthians 7:13b-8:7

We rejoiced at the joy of Titus because his mind was set at rest by you.  
For I have been somewhat boastful about you to him.  
Our boasting to Titus has proved true.  
And his heart goes out to you because he remembers your obedience  
and how you welcomed him with fear and trembling.  
I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you.

We want you to know, brothers and sisters,  
about the grace of God granted to the churches of Macedonia;  
during a time of severe ordeal of affliction,  
their abundant joy and their extreme poverty  
have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.  
They voluntarily gave according to their means,  
and even beyond their means,  
begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry.  
They gave themselves first to the Lord,  
and, by the will of God, to us,  
so we might urge Titus that as he has already made a beginning,  
he should complete this generous undertaking among you.  
Now as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge,  
in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you –  
so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.

\* How do we encourage faith communities to be all that they can be in living generously? How can faith communities inspire one another?

\* How does one leader prepare the way for another, entrusting the people and the leader to God?

*Generous God, creator and steward, we thank you for faith communities across the world who, in the midst of their poverty, have given for the sake of others. May we grow in such faith and generosity. In Christ Jesus, Amen.*

## May 3

### 2 Corinthians 8:8-15

I do not say this as a command,  
but am testing the genuineness of your love  
against the earnestness of others.

For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor,  
so that by his poverty you might become rich.

\* If giving is not a competition, how does Christ's giving himself for us  
ground all of our giving?

It is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something  
but even to desire to do something –  
now finish doing it.

If the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable  
according to what one has –  
not according to what one does not have.

I do not mean there should be relief for others and pressure on you,  
but it is a matter of balance between  
your present abundance and their need.

\* How could one interpret vs. 15, "The one who had much did not have too  
much and the one who had little did not have too little" (Ex.16:18)?

*Lord Jesus Christ, who for our sakes became poor, you showed through the  
cross your generous love for us. Empower us through your resurrection to do  
what we say we want to do, to give ourselves for those in need. Amen.*

## May 4

### 2 Corinthians 8:16-24

Thanks be to God who put in the heart of Titus  
the same eagerness for you that I myself have.  
He not only accepted our appeal, but, more eager than ever,  
he is going to you of his own accord.

With him we are sending the brother who is famous  
among all the churches for his proclaiming the good news  
who has been appointed by the churches to travel with us  
while we are administering this generous undertaking  
for the glory of the Lord and to show our goodwill.  
No one should blame us about this gift we are administering,  
for we intend to do what is right not only in the Lord's sight,  
but also in the sight of others.

As for Titus, he is my partner and co-worker in your service;  
as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches,  
the glory of Christ.

Therefore openly before the churches,  
show them the proof of your love  
and of our reason for boasting about you.

\* We want to know more about the situation in Corinth. What is the eagerness  
and the complexity there and then? And now?

\* How do we share partners and send messengers in the ministry of  
accompaniment we have with one another as churches today?

*Lord of the churches, you bind us as one and you commission us to walk with,  
pray for, serve, love, give, support and send messengers to one another. Open  
our hearts to receive one another in your name. Amen.*

## May 5

### 2 Corinthians 9:1-7

It is not necessary for me to write you about the ministry of the saints. I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you may not prove to have been empty in this case, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be; otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated – to say nothing of you – in this undertaking. So I urged the brothers to go ahead to you to arrange in advance this bountiful gift that you have promised, so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as an extortion.

\* Extortion? Humiliation? Is giving and keep our promises so hard? How do we earnestly prepare one another, stir up each other's zeal and hold one another accountable in the challenge?

The point is this:  
the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly,  
and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.  
Each of you must give as you have made up your mind,  
not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

*Lord, give us generous hearts. Amen.*

## May 6

### 2 Corinthians 9:8-15

God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance so that by having enough you may share abundantly in **every** good work. "God scatters abroad, God gives to the poor, God's righteousness endures forever." (Ps. 112:9)  
The one who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

The furnishing of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.

\* It has been said we give to the glory of God. Here the emphasis is on the needs of people. How is this a helpful way to think about being thankful to God?

Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and all others, while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that has been given to you.

\* Does God test? We are not able to be obedient, are we? How is our ministry of giving generously a mark and a sign of the genuineness of our confession of the gospel? How does this build relationships?

*Thanks be to God for God's indescribable gift! Amen.*

## May 7 2 Corinthians 10:1-11

I appeal to you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ –  
I who am humble when face to face with you  
and bold toward you when I am away!

When I am present I need not show boldness by daring to oppose those  
who think we are acting according to human standards.  
We live as human beings but we do not wage war  
according to human standards;  
for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human,  
but they have divine power to destroy strongholds.  
We destroy arguments, and every proud obstacle  
raised up against the knowledge of God,  
and we take every thought captive to obey Christ.

If you are confident that you belong to Christ,  
remind yourself that just as you belong to Christ, so also do we.  
Even if I boast too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for  
building you up and not for tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of it.  
I do not want to seem like I am trying to frighten you with my letters.  
People say, “His letters are weighty and strong,  
but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible.”  
Let them understand that what we say by letter when absent,  
we will also do when present.

\* Paul uses the metaphor of war (Note that Paul advocates *going* to war to convince people of Christianity) to challenge the obstacles to God’s knowledge. How sharp is your mind and your speech in speaking boldly and intelligently for Christ? And how do you do this with the gentleness of Christ?

\* What do you make of Paul’s reference to people’s comments about his own speech? What about your own varied gifts and skills in communication? Is there a consistency in what you say “when present” and “when absent”?

*O God, fill us with your divine Spirit to ambassadors for Christ. Amen.*

## May 8 2 Corinthians 10:12-18

We do not dare compare ourselves with some who commend themselves.  
But when they measure and compare themselves by one another,  
they do not show good sense.  
We, however, will not boast beyond limits, but will keep within the field  
that God has assigned to us, to reach out even as far as you.  
We were not overstepping our limits when we reached you;  
we were the first to come to you with the good news of Christ.  
We do not boast beyond limits, that is, in the labors of others;  
but our hope is that, as your faith increases,  
our outreach among you may be greatly enlarged,  
so that we may proclaim the good news in lands beyond you,  
without boasting of work already done in someone else’s area.

\* We cannot compare present day expansion of the church with New Testament times; however, the issue of overstepping boundaries and laboring in someone else’s territory continues. How do we respect the work of another faith community? When another infringes on our labors, what can we do? What should we not do? How might we support one another rather than compete?

\*How do you see faith increasing within your faith community? How might you proclaim the good news in ever new and meaningful ways?

*We do not seek commendation beyond your own, dear Lord. Even then, we know that it is by grace that you call us to labor so that the Gospel might be extended. Save us from senseless comparisons and competitive measurements. We seek your wisdom in sharing the ministry to which Christ calls us. “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” Amen.*

## May 9 2 Corinthians 11:1-11

I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness.

Do bear with me!

I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I promised  
to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

But I am afraid, as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning,  
your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed  
or if you received a different spirit from the one you received,  
or a different gospel from the one you accepted,  
you submit to it readily enough.

I think that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles.

I may be untrained in speech, but not in knowledge;  
certainly we have made this evident to you.

Did I commit a sin by humbling myself so that you might be exalted,  
because I proclaimed God's good news to you free of charge?

I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you.

When I was with you and in need I did not burden anyone,  
for my needs were supplied by the friends who came from Macedonia.

I refrained and will continue to refrain from burdening you in any way.

As the truth of Christ is in me,  
this boast of mine will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia.

And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!

\* What do we do when we fear that the people of faith we love are being  
persuaded by a "super apostle" who is leading them astray?

\* The images of church as "virgin" for Christ and Eve as source of sin were  
(and are) often misused to define women. In context, what is the real concern  
Paul has for this community's faith in the gospel?

\*Think of meanings today of "robbing other churches" to support one.

*Christ Jesus, we grow to love the people among whom we are called to teach  
and preach. Give us wisdom to know when to act humbly and when to speak  
boldly, and how to lead in the face of challenge. Amen.*

## May 10 2 Corinthians 11:12-21a

I continue to deny an opportunity to those "super-apostles"  
who want to be recognized as our equals in what they boast about.  
Such boasters are false apostles, deceitful workers,  
disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

And no wonder!

Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.  
So it is not strange that Satan's ministers also disguise themselves  
as ministers of righteousness.

Their end will match their deeds.

I repeat, let no one think that I am a fool;  
but if you do, then accept me as a fool,  
so that I may boast a little too.

What I am saying in regard to this boastful confidence,

I am saying not with the Lord's authority, but as a fool.

Since many boast according to human standards, I will also boast.

Being so wise yourselves, you seem to gladly put up with fools!

For you put up with it when someone makes slaves of you,

or preys upon you, or takes advantage of you,

or puts on airs, or gives you a slap in the face.

To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!

\* When have you seen people disguising themselves as ministers of  
righteousness and doing the work of Satan? (We, too, or course, can become  
ministers of Satan.)

\* With much sarcasm, Paul says he speaks not with the Lord's authority, but  
as a fool. What do you think he means by that? When do you speak that way?

\* What are some of your deep concerns about people being taken advantage  
of, being made slaves, being preyed upon?

*O God, who calls us to minister faithfully, we care terribly about people being  
led astray. Give us your wisdom and your care that we may speak and act  
boldly to up build people in their faith. In Christ, Amen*

## May 11

### 2 Corinthians 11:21b-33

Whatever anyone dares to boast of,  
(I am still speaking like a fool)

I also dare to boast of that.

Are they Hebrews? **So am I.**

Are they descendants of Abraham? **So am I.**

Are they ministers of Christ? (I talk like a madman)

**I am a better one:**

with far greater labors, far more imprisonments,  
with countless floggings, and often near death.

Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and day I was adrift at sea;  
on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, bandits,  
danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles,  
danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea,  
danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship,  
through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty,  
often without food, cold and naked,

And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure  
because of my anxiety for all the churches.

Who is weak, and I am not weak?

If I must boast, I will boast in things that show my weakness.

The governor guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me,  
but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall,  
and escaped from his hands.

\* We would be foolish to try to match our sufferings with Paul's...or with any other servant of Christ. But perhaps we can relate to the daily pressure and anxiety for the Church. Take time to reflect on your own sufferings and anxieties. Pray about them and for one another.

*If we must boast, let us boast in things that show our weakness, O God. When we suffer for the sake of the Gospel, may we lay all at the feet of Christ's cross. When we need to prove ourselves, when we start to seek approval, may we be turned around so that we seek to be known and justified by your grace alone. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

## May 12

### 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

It is necessary to boast; nothing is to be gained by it,  
but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.

I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago  
was caught up in the third heaven—

whether in the body or out of the body I do not know;

God knows.

And I know that such a person—

whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows—  
was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told,  
that no mortal is permitted to repeat.

On behalf of such a one I will boast,

but on my own behalf I will not boast,  
except of my weaknesses.

But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth.  
I refrain, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen or heard  
from me, even considering the exceptional character of the revelations.

To keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh,  
a messenger of Satan to torment me.

Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me,  
but God said to me,

“My grace is sufficient for you,

for power is made perfect in weakness.”

Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions  
and calamities for the sake of Christ;  
for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

\* What do you think about Paul's revelations? How do his experiences speak to you?

*God, Creator of the heavens and the earth, join us to the cross of Christ that, by the power of your Spirit, we may surely know that your grace is sufficient for us so that we might be strong in our own weaknesses. In Christ, Amen.*

## May 13

### 2 Corinthians 12:11-18

I have been a fool! You forced me to it.  
Indeed you should have been the ones commending me,  
for I am not at all inferior to these super-apostles,  
even though I am nothing.

The signs of a true apostle were performed among you  
with utmost patience, signs and wonders and mighty works.  
Here I am ready to come to you a third time.  
And I will not burden you.  
I will most gladly spend and be spent for you.  
If I love you more, am I to be loved less?

Let it be assumed that I did not burden you.  
Nevertheless (you say) since I was crafty,  
I took you in by deceit.  
Did I take advantage of you through any of those I sent to you?  
I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him.  
Titus did not take advantage of you, did he?  
Did we not conduct ourselves with the same spirit?  
Did we not take the same steps?

\* We need to go inside the situation at Corinth (should we be so able) to understand the human dynamics. In our own situations, what words and actions have caused accusations of deceit and being taken advantage of?

\* When do we, or should we, or should we not, burden one another?  
Think of someone or some people who have “spent” their love on you.

*Forgive us, Lord, for the wrongs we commit, for assuming we are worse off than other faith communities, for misjudging and misguiding. May we so rest in your love that we may love one another, even and particularly when it is so hard to do. In Christ, Amen.*

## May 14

### 2 Corinthians 12:19-21

Have you been thinking that we have been defending ourselves before you?  
We are speaking in Christ before God.  
Everything we do, beloved, is for the sake of building you up.

\* What builds up the body of Christ? What role do leaders play? What roles do others in the community play? What is the role of the whole community?

I fear that when I come, I may find you not as I wish,  
and that you may find me not as you wish;  
I fear that there may perhaps be quarreling, jealousy, anger,  
selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder.  
I fear that when I come again, my God may humble me before you,  
and that I may have to mourn over many who previously sinned  
and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality,  
and licentiousness that they have practiced.

\* What have you discovered that tears down the body of Christ?

\* Perhaps we should not be surprised at the multitude of ways we sin, but we often are. Over what do you mourn? How do we—ought we—call one another to repentance?

*God, we humbly acknowledge the sin among us. We come to you in Christ. Call us to repentance that by the power of the Spirit we might turn from that which tears down people's lives and tears apart the body of Christ. Transform us, in Christ. Amen.*

## **May 15** **2 Corinthians 13:1-4**

This is the third time I am coming to you.  
“Any charge must be sustained by  
the evidence of two or three witnesses.”  
(Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15)

I warned those who sinned previously and all the others,  
and I warn them now while absent, as I did on my second visit,  
that if I come again I will not be lenient—  
since you desire proof that Christ is speaking in me.

Christ is not weak in dealing with you,  
but is powerful in you.  
He was crucified in weakness,  
but lives by the power of God.  
For we are weak in Christ,  
but in dealing with you  
we will live with him  
by the power of God.

\* Reflect on how Christ became weak for our sakes. Can you even imagine how difficult that was? Reflect on the power of the resurrection and the difference that makes.

\* How are we both weak in Christ, and powerful in Christ? How does that shape our ministry? How does that shape leadership?

*Christ crucified, in our weakness we depend upon you for strength. When we feel we no longer have the energy, the stamina, the courage, to do your work, fill us with your new life. Encourage, enliven and empower us for strong servanthood. Amen.*

## **May 16** **2 Corinthians 13:5-13**

Examine yourselves to see  
whether you are living in the faith.  
Test yourselves.

\* Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?

I hope you will find out that we have not failed.  
We pray to God that you may not do anything wrong.  
Not that we may appear to have met the test,  
but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed.  
We cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.  
For we rejoice when we are weak and you are strong.  
This is what we pray for, that you become perfect.

I write these things while I am away from you, so that when I come,  
I may not have to be severe in using the authority  
that the Lord has given me for building up and not tearing down.

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell.  
Put things in order,  
listen to my appeal,  
agree with one another,  
live in peace;  
And the God of love and peace will be with you.  
Greet one another with a holy kiss.  
All the saints greet you.

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of us. Amen.*



## May 17

### Galatians 1:1-10

Paul an apostle—sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities,

but through Jesus Christ and God the Father,  
who raised him from the dead—

and all the members of the God’s family who are with me,

To the churches of Galatia:

\* Who sent *you*? By whose authority do you minister where you are?

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,  
who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age,  
according to the will of our God and Father  
to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen

\* What greeting about sin and evil and grace and Jesus’ death and resurrection might you want to give or send to someone today? How? Will you?

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one  
who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—  
Not that there is another gospel but there are some who are confusing you  
and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

If anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received,  
let that one be accursed! Am I now seeking human approval  
or God’s approval? Am I trying to please people?

If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

\*As you serve, how do you discern your motives? How do you remind one another of the gospel?

*Oh God, we thank you for human community in Christ. May we meet and greet one another always in your grace, living in the peace of Christ. May we not desert the call to the Gospel but remain servants of Christ. Amen.*

## May 18

### Galatians 1:11s-24

I want you to know, brothers and sisters,  
that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin.  
I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it,  
but received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors.

But when God, who had set me apart before I was born  
and called me through grace, was pleased to reveal the Son to me,  
so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles,

I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus. Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days; but I did not see any other apostle except James, the Lord’s brother. In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie! Then I went into the region of Syria and Cilicia, and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; they only heard it said,

“The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy.” They glorified God because of me.

\* What is your “call” story? Have you told it recently?

\* Paul, who persecuted from the outside, now includes himself in the “us” of Christian community. Have you, or someone you know, been both “outside” and “inside” the faith community of Christ?

*We give glory to you, O God, for the transformation of the Apostle Paul. By the power of the Holy Spirit, transform us also—daily—that we with zeal might not persecute and oppress, but proclaim and confess the one Jesus Christ, in whom we have been joined as one. Amen*

## May 19 Galatians 2:1-10

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem  
with Barnabas taking Titus along with me.  
I laid before them  
(though only in a private meeting with the acknowledged leaders)  
the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles,  
in order to make sure that I was not running, or had not run, in vain.

But because of false believers, secretly brought in,  
who slipped in to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus,  
so that they might enslave us—  
we did not submit to them even for a moment,  
so that the truth of the gospel might always remain with you.

The God who worked through Peter making him an apostle to the circumcised  
also worked through me in sending me to the Gentiles.  
James and Cephas and John, acknowledged pillars,  
gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship,  
agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

\* What mistrust have you experienced among acknowledged “pillars” in the church? When have you failed to trust another’s office or role? How do we extend the hand of fellowship to each other?

They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor,  
which was actually what I was eager to do.

\* “Remember the poor” is a haunting and challenging phrase. How do we do that compassionately, liturgically, spiritually, physically, graciously, prophetically, courageously, politically, communally?

*May we not run in vain, O God. May your Spirit guide us in mission. Forgive our undermining of one another’s ministries. Give us vision and wisdom for collaborative ministry, locally, regionally, churchwide, globally, and ecumenically. And, most of all, may we in bold, caring action remember the poor. In Christ Jesus we pray. Amen.*

## May 20 Galatians 2:11-14

When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face,  
because he stood self-condemned;  
for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles.  
But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate  
for fear of the circumcision faction.  
And the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy,  
so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said,  
“If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew,  
how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

\* What is going on in Antioch? What is the hypocrisy there? What are the factions about which Paul speaks?

\* “It’s full of hypocrites” is a common rationale for people not joining—or why they leave—the church. And of course it is! How does hypocrisy lead people astray and away? How do you react to it – in others, and in yourself?

\* “He kept him separate for fear of...” How do factions separate, isolate, and alienate?

\* If we do not live like Christians, how can we effectively witness to the Gospel?

*God of truth, may we live with integrity in consistency with the truth of the gospel. Guard us, we who are so prone to point out the hypocrisy of others, from our own hypocrisy. Convert us, transform us, and shape us as communities of faith in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

## May 21

### Galatians 2:15-21

We know that a person is justified not by the works of the law  
but through faith in Jesus Christ.  
And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus  
so that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law.

But if, in our effort to be justified in Christ, we have been found to be sinners,  
is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not!  
But if I build up again the very things that I once tore down,  
then I demonstrate that I am a transgressor.  
Through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.  
I have been crucified with Christ;  
and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.  
The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God  
who loved me and gave himself for me.

I do not nullify the grace of God;  
for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing.

\* Christ, a servant of sin? Christ, dying for nothing? Consider carefully these strong words concerning how each day we continue to try to justify ourselves.

\* Consider carefully these powerfully liberating words, “I died to the law so that I might live to God.” What might that really mean for servant leadership in the world?

\* “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” How do these words both free me from my self-destructive, self-justifying personhood, and, at the same time give my identity and my life a fullness I could never have imagined without Christ?

*We live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us. Amen.*

## May 22

### Galatians 3:1-9

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?  
It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified!  
The only thing I want to learn from you is this:  
Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law  
or by believing what you heard?  
Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit,  
are you now ending with the flesh?  
Did you experience so much for nothing?—if it really was for nothing.

\* Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?

Just as Abraham “believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,”  
(Gen. 15:6)  
so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham.  
The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith,  
announced the good news to Abraham, saying  
“All the peoples shall be blessed in you.”  
(Gen. 12:3; 18:18, 22:18)

Abraham believed and was blessed, so all who believe are blessed as he was.

\* What are the ramifications of being joined to Abraham and the Hebrew people through belief in God’s gracious activity, unconditional love and covenant faithfulness?

*God of mercy and love, we are too often foolish in not believing what is right in front of us. You have called us to faith through the Holy Spirit. Join us with all your faithful people that you may continue to work miracles among and through us. In Christ, Amen.*

## May 23

### Galatians 3:10-22

All who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written,  
“Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey  
all the things written in the book of the law.” (Deut. 27:36)  
It is evident that no one is justified before God by the law;  
for “The one who is righteousness will live by faith.” (Hab. 2:4)

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us,  
for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”— (Deut. 21:23)  
in order that in Christ Jesus  
the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles,  
so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Brothers and sisters, I give an example from daily life:  
once a person’s will has been ratified, no one adds to it or annuls it.  
The promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring, not offsprings,  
that is to one person, who is Christ.  
The law which came 430 years later, does not annul a covenant  
previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.  
For if the inheritance comes from the law,  
it no longer comes from the promise;  
but God granted it to Abraham through the promise.

\* Why then the law?

It was added because of transgressions,  
until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made.

\* Is the law then opposed to the promises of God?

Certainly not! If a law had been given that could make alive,  
then righteousness would indeed come through the law.

*God of righteousness, we know that through scripture all things have been imprisoned under the power of sin. We thank you and praise your holy name that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ has been given to those who believe, and that the one who is righteous will live by faith. In Christ we pray. Amen.*

## May 24

### Galatians 3:23-29

Until faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law.  
The law was our disciplinarian until Christ came,  
so that we might be justified by faith.  
But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian,  
for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.

\* Imprisoned, guarded! Feel what it is like to be under a disciplinarian. Now—once in time and each day today--feel what it is like to be made right with God and each other.

As many of you as were baptized into Christ  
have clothed yourselves with Christ.

\* Picture being clothed in Christ. How does that change your appearance, your actions, your relationships, your sense of identity? How do you remember your baptism?

**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.**

\* How does this powerful Gal. 3:28 passage change everything? In a world of injustice, burdened by racism, classism, sexism, militarism, and fear of the other, what can you do to actualize our all being one?

If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring,  
heirs according to the promise.

\* When we all belong, how does that change the way we live together in Christ as heirs according to the promise?

*Justified by faith, Christ Jesus, help us to fully realize that we are one. Embolden us to take down the walls of suspicion and division. Empower us for partnerships of equality. Clothe us with your very self that we may see you in each other. Amen.*

## May 25 Galatians 4:1-11

My point is this: heirs, as long as they are minors,  
are no better than slaves, though they are owners of the property;  
they remain under guardians until the date set by the father.  
So with us; while we were minors,  
we were enslaved to the elemental spirits of the world.

\* How quickly Paul falls back to the cultural mindset of slaves and non-slaves.  
What *is* his point? How does this metaphor both help and hinder?

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent God's Son,  
born of a woman, born under the law,  
in order to redeem those who were under the law,  
so that we might receive adoption as children.  
And because you are children, God sent the Spirit of the Son  
into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"  
So, you are no longer a slave but a child,  
and if a child, also an heir, through God.

Formerly, when you did not know God,  
you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods.

- \* How can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits?
- \* How can you want to be enslaved again?
- \* What special days, months, seasons and years of other spirits do we observe?

I am afraid that my work for you may have been wasted.

*When the fullness of time came, Abba, you sent your Son to be born of a woman to redeem us who were under the law. We thank you for our adoption. Hold us close to you in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

## May 26 Galatians 4:12-20

Friends, I beg you, become as I am,  
for I also have become as you are.  
You have done me no wrong.

You know that it was because of a physical infirmity  
that I first announced the gospel to you;  
though my condition put you to the test, you did not scorn or reject me,  
but received me as you would Christ Jesus.

What has become of the good will you felt?  
You would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.  
Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?

Those other people show deep interest in you,  
but their intentions are not good.  
All they want is to separate you from me.  
My dear children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth  
until Christ is formed in you,  
I wish I were present with you now  
so that I could take a different attitude toward you.  
I am so worried about you.

\* What has changed in the relationship? How do changes in ministry relationships affect you and whole congregations? What causes you to worry?

*God of wholeness and health, minister through our physical disabilities. Care for our congregations in the midst of pain, conflict, and temptation to waver from the Gospel. Separate us not, but help us receive each other as Christ Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.*

## May 27

### Galatians 4:21-5:1

\* Tell me, you who desire to be subject to the law,  
will you not listen to the law?

Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman, the other by a free woman.  
The allegory: Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, in slavery with her children.  
The other woman is Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother.

You, my friends, are children of the promise, like Isaac.  
What does Scripture say? “Drive out the slave and her child;  
the child of the slave will not share the inheritance  
with the child of the free woman.” (Gen. 21:10)

Friends, we are children, not of the slave but of the free woman.

\* How does this allegory make the point about living no longer under legalism  
but through the promise? How have the images of this allegory been misused  
to set Jew and Christian against Arab and Muslim?

For freedom Christ has set us free.  
Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

*God of freedom through the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ Jesus,  
may we live according to the promise of new life and reconciliation and peace.  
Forgive us our eagerness, when we place ourselves again under legalistic and  
self-righteous judgment, to cast into the wilderness those not in our circle.  
May we not submit to the yoke of legalistic, judgmental, exclusionary slavery.  
May we, living by the promise, beyond allegory, enslave no one else,  
economically, politically, or in any other way. In Christ, Amen.*

## May 28

### Galatians 5:2-12

Listen! I, Paul, tell every man who lets himself be circumcised  
that he is obliged to obey the entire law.

You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ;  
you have fallen away from grace.

For through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.  
In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything;  
the only thing that counts is faith working through love.

\* If for Christians today circumcision is no longer a defining rite, what other  
ritual marks have people tried to use to determine if a person is a “true”  
Christian or not?

\* Why is it important to teach that keeping one law does not justify us? How  
does understanding that in order to be justified by being “right” or “good” we  
would have to keep the entire law to help us more fully appreciate our need for  
grace through Christ?

You were doing so well! Who made you stop obeying the truth?  
A little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough.  
Whoever it is that is confusing you will pay the penalty.  
But my friends, why am I still being persecuted if I still preach circumcision?  
In that case the offense of the cross has been removed.  
I wish those who unsettle you would castrate themselves.

\* “A little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough” is used in many ways. How  
is it used in this text?

\* What is the “offense of the cross”? If we preach and practice other ways to  
placate and please God, how do we lessen the radical, tragic, wonderful death  
of Christ for us?

*Christ Jesus, may your cross alone center our faith working through love.  
Amen.*

## May 29

### Galatians 5:13-15

You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters;  
only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence,  
but through love become slaves to one another.

For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment,  
“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

If, however, you bite and devour one another,  
take care that you are not consumed by one another.

- \* What does it mean for you that you have been called to freedom?  
From what are we free? For what are we free?
- \* What is freedom other than becoming slaves to one another? Since we have been freed from slavery to the law, how do we live, share Christ, work for justice and peace as freed slaves, powerful servants? Free in Christ and now slaves to each other! What does that mean and not mean?
- \* So what are your self-indulgences that might enslave you once again?
- \* How do we bite and devour each other? How does that consume us all?

*God of mercy and grace, may we who have been freed from the demands of the law through Jesus' cross and resurrection be positively consumed by your love that so we do not consume one another in our own prejudices and greed. Free us for consistent, caring servanthood in Christ. Amen*

## May 30

### Galatians 5:16-26

Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh.  
What the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit,  
and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh;  
these are opposed to each other to prevent you from doing what you want.  
If you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law.

The works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness,  
idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions,  
factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing...and things like these.

Those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity,  
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

There is no law against such things.

\* If we are not justified by works, why the warning about not inheriting the kingdom? “Under the law” is key. How does doing only “what we want” (the *works* of the flesh) keep us from loving relationships with one another? How does the fruit (*singular*—of the *one* Spirit of God) lead us beyond ourselves, beyond being justified by the law, to loving, peace-filled relationships?

\* Ponder each of the lists.

*May we always remember that we who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another, but love one another as you have loved us. Amen.*

## **May 31** **Galatians 6:1-6**

My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression,  
you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one  
in a spirit of gentleness.

\* Recall a time when someone restored you in a spirit of gentleness.  
Recall a time when you needed to call someone else back from  
transgression.

Take care that you yourselves are not tempted.  
Bear one another's burdens,  
and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

\* Recall a time when you were tempted.  
Give thanks for a time when you, or others, bore another's burden.

If those who are nothing think they are something,  
they deceive themselves.  
All must test their own work;  
then that work, rather than their neighbor's work,  
will become a cause for pride.

\* Recall a time when you deceived yourself.  
Recall a time when you judged your neighbor's work rather than your own.

For all must carry their own loads.  
Those who are taught the word  
must share in all good things with their teacher.

*We who are nothing, who deceive ourselves in judging, fill us with the Spirit  
that we may be restored and in the spirit of Christ's gentleness help restore all  
creation. Amen.*