



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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October 7, 2012

Pentecost 19

Sermon Text: [Philippians 1:12-18a](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Numbers 11:16, 24-29](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 51b](#)

Second Lesson: [Philippians 1:12-18a](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Mark 9:38-50](#)

What Does It Matter?

It is not important that life or people be fair
The important thing is that Christ is preached

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

For most of my life I was probably pretty indifferent to the word “whatever.” That’s until one of my teenagers started using it in ways that irritated me. I hate the word “whatevs.” It’s not a word. Yet that’s the response I get when I tell one of my daughters from time to time to go do something or this is what should be done. “Whatevs.” I can’t stand that. It really irritates me. It really annoys me. It becomes almost dismissive. “You’re an idiot, an old idiot. You don’t know what you’re talking about. I’m young and I know everything.” All that in two syllables, right?

Here we hear the word “whatever” in a sense used in a very God-pleasing way though. From what I just read to you, we hear the apostle Paul kind of say “whatevs” to things in his life that just truly stunk. I don’t think we can truly appreciate how amazing what I just read to you from Paul is until you know the whole story.

To say “What has happened to me has really served to advance the cause of the Gospel,” I think it took him some time to come to this conclusion. I don’t think as everything that was happening was happening to him he was saying “This is great. This is going to advance the cause of the Gospel.”

When he writes this, he’s in chains in Rome awaiting his appeal to Caesar. He had appealed to Caesar because he had been arrested after coming into the temple and a mob started a riot and wanted to kill him because they were accusing him of bringing Gentiles beyond the Court of the Gentiles into a part of the temple where they shouldn’t be. He hadn’t done it, but they wanted to cause trouble for him because he was proclaiming Christ crucified. They had killed Christ, and they didn’t want to hear this anymore. So they caused trouble for him.

The Roman guard seized him and took him into chains that day. Paul was a Roman citizen so he shouldn’t have been chained. They hear that the Jews wanted to kill him. They hear about this plot against his life. So 70 people on horseback take him to Caesarea, to the capital where the governor was, to lock him up there until they can

hear his case. Because they are so afraid they are going to kill him that next day, he is rushed off. He goes there and thinks "Now I'll get my case heard. I'll get released. I'll get to go on preaching the Gospel."

Two years he sits there in Caesarea in prison. Two years! Two years in prison because he was accused of bringing someone someplace in the temple, which he hadn't done, and he never got a hearing. Two years because the governor was waiting for a bribe to come from Paul or his friends and the bribe never came. Then the governor left office. The next governor comes in and he must have gained favor with the Jews so he doesn't do anything for Paul. So finally when Paul meets with him, he says "I appeal to Caesar." That was his right as a Roman citizen.

So now you think things are going to shape up. Now things are going to get done. To get to Rome, a Centurion and some other soldiers had to take him there. They caught the ship too late in the year. They go from place to place and they finally shipwreck on an island. They almost all die, but Paul had told them "God will spare all our lives." To think that as he is drifting on a piece of wood as it is going to shore he's thinking "This is great. God is advancing the cause of the Gospel. How wonderful my life is that God is working in this wonderful way in my life." You think? I don't think so.

Then he finally gets to Rome after this arduous journey, and it's been well over two years, and now he is in chains in the emperor's prison. The Philippians were concerned about him. They loved him dearly. He had shared the Gospel with them. They had sent Epaphroditus to him with some supplies to help make his imprisonment more bearable. I don't know what they sent. It's not like he got three squares and a cot as a prisoner of Rome at that time. They helped take care of his physical needs, and they wanted to hear back how he was doing because they were afraid this was hurting Paul and hurting the Gospel.

After all this time, if I'm writing this letter I'm going to say "Hey, life isn't fair. I got thrown in prison for something I didn't do. I don't get a hearing. That's not fair. I have to go through all this travel trouble and I have to be shipwrecked. I almost drowned in the sea. All this because some putzes are attacking me for doing something I didn't do. Life stinks! And how are you?" That would be my letter. I have to believe that's probably yours too at various times in your life.

We go through life and it stinks. We face difficulty. We face challenges. We bring some on ourselves because we are sinners and do foolish things and it leads to problems in our relationships. That happens at times. But sometimes it just comes from someone else doing something that's unfair to us and then the struggle becomes inside of us. How am I going to respond to this? Am I going to respond in kind to someone who attacks me and attack them back? Life's not fair, am I going to respond with complaints, with shaking my fist at God, with all kinds of other things? There are times when we certainly are tempted to do that. There probably are times when you and I give into that temptation to sin and we sin.

I have to believe that Paul probably gave into some of those temptations along the way too, but as he had all this time to look back on it, now he says “Life might not be fair, but God is still in control and God is still bringing good.” God has promised to work all things for our good, our eternal good, not our earthly happiness. He’s promised to work all things for our eternal good. Paul now sees that not only was he working this for his eternal good, because he had learned to depend on Christ through all of these difficulties and not on himself, he learned to rely on Christ, he also sees how God was using it for the good of others.

When he writes to the Philippians, I think the Philippians would have been thrilled to death to hear some of the things that Paul says. He says “As a result, what has happened to me has served to advance the Gospel.” He came to that conclusion. It probably took time. “It has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.” I think that sentence would have thrilled the Philippians.

Philippi was a Roman colony. It was the soil of Rome itself even though it was far away in Greece. Many of the people that had served as Roman legionnaires were given land after their service was done. They would be given land in a place like Philippi because Rome was full. So there would be a lot of retired Roman soldiers that probably were a part of this congregation of believers. The palace guard is the praetorium guard, thousand of elite troupes that served the emperor directly. And they served in this prison as well. When those guys hear that a palace guard has come to understand that Paul was in chains for the Gospel of Christ, and when they hear that this Gospel has spread because evidently these guys had listened to Paul dictate these letters that he was writing. They had listened to him talk to visitors. They had heard him talk about Christ. They learned about a Savior. Now they were talking to other people in Rome about it. “To everyone else I am in chains because of Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the Word of God more courageously and more fearlessly.” These elite soldiers evidently were telling some other people as well that this guy was not like the other prisoners they guarded. This guy was not a criminal, but he was fervent in what he believed and taught and he was different than everyone else. And it stuck out. So they told other people about it and the Gospel was being spread through Rome.

I suppose way back then the Philippians didn’t high five each other like we would today, but today that’s what the congregation would be doing when they heard this because their fellow soldiers were coming to know their Savior. They would have been thrilled to death.

Paul can say “Whatever. What does it matter that life isn’t fair to me because the Gospel is still being proclaimed. Christ still took away all of my sins,” the times that he had failed his God, and that forgiveness was being spread to others.

For you and me, when we face our difficulties and our challenges, it takes a lot to get to this point, and we don’t always get to this point immediately or even every single time.

But there comes a time as we grow through Word and Sacrament in our love for our God and our trust in our God, there will be those times when we are facing difficulty and problems and anxieties and worries and that life isn't fair, but we face it with this trust that my God still loves me and I am still forgiven, and he will help me through it all. Someone else might well notice and say "How can you face this the way you are?" Then we have that opportunity to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Not just to say things will get better, but to say "My God still loves me. I'm still going to heaven. So what if I have to suffer now."

We might suffer as we struggle to get to that point from within us. There will be times when we'll fail, and we'll see our failure and Satan will want us to beat ourselves up over our sins. At those times, flee to the Gospel of Jesus Christ that he died to take away your sins, your failures to live trusting in God, your failures to seize the opportunities to share the Gospel of Christ with others. Know that you are forgiven so that then you go forward and you can do these things in the future. It's not important that life is fair. What is important is that Christ is preached.

Not only was it the unfairness of life that had to trouble Paul, did you catch that in the second paragraph of what I read to you about his fellow believers being unfair to Paul? He said "Some people have become more encouraged to speak." These new believers, these soldiers, they were probably speaking. Some of the other believers that were in the congregation at Rome were probably speaking because we are told that whole synagogues had converted to Christianity in Rome. But we are told that some of those believers were now more emboldened to speak. Some because they saw how Paul had done it and that example encouraged them, but others because they saw Paul in a vulnerable spot and they wanted to speak for their own selfish ambition. They proclaimed Christ, but they did it out of envy for Paul and trying to make trouble for Paul.

He says, "What they are saying might still be true but they are saying it for the wrong reasons." If you are doing the right thing for the wrong reason, you're still sinning. They were sinning directly against Paul because in some way, shape or form it was selfish ambition that was attacking him. So if I'm writing that letter, I'm going to say "let those people have it. What they're doing is wrong." It was. Paul doesn't say what they were doing was right. But he does say "What does it matter? If what they are saying about Christ is true and if they are trying to hurt me by doing it, as long as Christ is preached, I'm happy."

Again, to me this amazing that Paul had matured to this level because I know how often I'm not at that level of spiritual maturity. I think if you're honest with yourself, you have to admit you're not always at that level of spiritual maturity and when someone speaks against you, you want to lash out in kind, right? It's natural. It's what we do. It's who we are. That's all true. But it's also sin.

Maturing to the point where we don't lash out at those who attack us, at those who are trying to make trouble for me while I'm in chains, those who are trying to make trouble

for us, not to lash out at them, that's what our God wants us to do. I suppose it's easier to do when we learn to do what Paul did...when we learn to focus on what is truly important.

In your life, what is truly important is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Yes, you're busy and you get sidetracked by a lot of things, but when you lay your head on the pillow at the end of the day, the only thing that is truly going to matter in your life is, do you know Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin?

If you know him as your Savior from sin, you have someone bigger than you are beside you, holding you up and sustaining you through unfair people and unfair events of life. There really becomes only one imperative for you and me, not to get even, not to demand that life be fair, but to know our Savior better so he can sustain us when life isn't fair or when people are jerks to us.