

Proper 6

(Third Sermon in the series on Paul's Epistle to the Galatians)

Galatians 2:20a *"I am crucified with Christ, never the less, I live."*

### GOOSE BUMPS

*Heavenly Father, we pray that, by your grace, these merely human words may become servants of the Living Word, and that the Living Word may become flesh in our flesh; in our hands and feet, in our head and hearts and lips. And may your kingdom come and may your will be truly done in us as it is in heaven. Amen.*

Goose Bumps. When our pastor suggested that the preaching team present a sermon series on Paul's Epistle to the Galatians the hair on my arms and the back of my neck stood up, and I got a tingle down my spine. At first I couldn't pin-point the source of my excitement, but after a little reflection I think I nailed it. But to explain myself I'll have to tell a story.

Almost three decades ago I was having one of my periodic wrestling matches with God. We fought to a draw and were both exhausted. Several years prior to this dual, I had walked away from the church and the culture that had nourished me all my life. I had grown disillusioned with my denomination, with my profession, and mostly with myself. But life moves on, as it tends to do, and I was, once again, doing battle with the source of my soul.

Like many American and Europeans who have become alienated from their spiritual roots, I was attracted to many of the ideas from the East, particularly Buddhism. So I was in a bit of a crisis. Finally, in a fit of sleepless exhaustion, is said, "Lord, do you want me to be a Buddhist, or a Christian...or what?" With that simple, but desperate prayer, this insomniac finally got some sleep.

I woke up feeling rather refreshed, and without really thinking about I went to the pile of books there on my night-stand and picked up the old Bible from back in my Baptist-preacher-days. As I thumbed through it, again without giving it a lot of thought, I decided to read...(not the Epistle to the Galatians, that would have been a little too perfect)...the Epistle to the Romans, which is a kind of mirror and amplifier of the Galatians letter.

Now, I had graduated a full decade before this moment, and I had read the Roman Epistle, in whole or in part, a hundred times or more, but this time it was waaaay different. It seemed as if I had stepped into a new world. The words seemed to jump off the page and went straight into my soul. Sitting there on the edge of the bed, I lifted up my eyes and said, "Well, all right, then!"

Parenthetically, I want to say that this should not be read as a rejection of Buddhism. I have two treasured gifts from my daughter, two Buddha figurines. I have a skinny Buddha, and a fat laughing Buddha sitting side-by-side on my bookshelf, and the three of us get along just fine. I honor all paths, and try to learn from all paths, but it became clear to me on that particular gettin' up morning that whatever path someone else might choose, my way was to be the Jesus way, my path was to be

the Jesus path. I have seldom, if ever, had a prayer answered so quickly, or so decisively. It was enough to give a fellow goose bumps.

While I am as big a fool as anyone, I am not such a fool as to think everyone should have the same kinds of spiritual experiences. But I do have the audacity to hope that goose bumps can sometimes go be infectious. The preacher in me hopes that the truths embedded in the Epistle to the Galatians can jump off the pages of history and go viral among us.

I've mentioned before that many of the best minds and greatest spirits in our own faith-tradition, and in our own time, are convinced the church is on the cutting edge of a great transition. They have discovered that at about every 500 years or so, since the church was first established, profound, foundation-shaking changes occur. The last of these great transitions is known as the Great Reformation, and it kicked off just about 500 years ago. The evidence for this present transition is vast and growing and I too am convinced.

I would like to read some other goose bump inducing words from a great poet in our Anglican tradition. Several years before his public declaration of faith, T.S. Eliot wrote:

*The word within a word, unable to speak a word*

*Swaddled in darkness. In the juvenescence of the year*

*Came Christ the tiger.*

Please allow me to repeat these, because you may not have heard them before, and because they are wonderful:

...

The gentle Jesus, meek and mild, is a very fine fellow I am sure, but in the coming days of the great transition, and the trials and tribulations of this very hour, only Christ the Tiger will do.

In the many discussions about the great transition there is an aspect that doesn't get enough attention in my opinion. These unique moments in the history of the church and the world are always accompanied by the renewed sense of the importance and vitality of the Scriptures. The Reformation is probably the clearest example:

For nearly a thousand years it was impractical and illegal for a lay-person to own a Bible, and it was a capital offence to possess, or read, or even hear the scriptures read in one's native tongue. Buckets of blood were spilt for the privilege you and I have of reading the holy scriptures any time we want in our own language. The Great Reformation was coincident with the beginnings of the wide-spread use of the printing press and the increase in literacy all across Europe, and so in some places it was reported that lay-persons, farmers and housewives would often know more scripture than the village priest. This was a change in human consciousness that changed the world.

Now, as we stand on the precipice of this next great transition, each and every one of us, each and every day, is influenced by that great monster of global information we call the internet (which is basically just a printing press on steroids). Lord have mercy. Let the excitement begin. There should be plenty of goose-bumps for everyone.

My text this morning is Galatians 2:20a, *I am crucified with Christ, never-the-less I live*. One of my fellow preaching team members asked me recently how my Galatians sermon was coming. I told her my only problem was deciding what to leave out. Well, as it came to pass, I left

out most of it. I see that my time is about up and I haven't even started preaching yet. But don't panic, everything is OK. No sermon I could ever preach is half as important as the sermon you preach to yourself, which brings us to this week's assignment (and I am serious about this, there just may be a test).

Your assignment this week is to preach a sermon to yourself asking the following question, "What does it mean to be crucified with Christ, but never-the-less to be alive"? Another way of posing it would be to say, "How can I be both dead in Christ, and alive, at the same time?"

Then another question will come to you; "How will I know when I've got the right answer"?

I won't pretend that there is an easy answer here. I won't pretend that the way isn't long and hard, sometimes. But here's a hint:

When the word of God leaps off the page,

When the word within the word, when Christ the tiger leaps out of history and into our hearts,

There will be goose bumps.

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