

Galatians 1:1-10
Second Sunday after Pentecost (C)
6 June 2010

“Whom Are We Trying To Please?”

I. Do you ever get tired of trying to please other people? And yet isn't that what we end up trying to do, probably most days of our lives? We worry what people are going to think about us. We get anxious about what people might say about us. And so we go on scrambling.

And while we do, we keep peeking to see what kind of looks we're getting. We keep sending up our antennae, desperate to pick up hints of compliment or murmurs of disapproval. We do it, because we've been led to believe that unless people think well of us, unless we're considered cool or popular, unless we can be part of the “in crowd,” we're somehow of less worth and value. In fact, we can become so worked up about it that we we'll bend over backwards, even become something that we're not, even to the point of selling our soul, just to have other people's approval, just to feel that we belong and are accepted and loved—while at the same time becoming paranoid wondering if the approval and acceptance we're getting is real and lasting, fearing one day it may evaporate or be withdrawn.

That's bad enough in itself, but have you ever felt like you have to go through those kind of somersaults with God, too? Have you ever had the sense that God is looking over your shoulder just waiting for you to mess up? Do you find yourself worrying: “How can I ever please Him? How do I know if I've ever done enough?” Perhaps you've pictured the Lord sitting in heaven with a red marking pen and a great, big scorecard, keeping track of your sins and good deeds in alternate columns, all the while hoping that in the end the pluses will outnumber the minuses.

But just who are we trying to please? Is God really keeping a running tally on our life? Does it really matter if others are pleased with us? Does our self-esteem and our happiness really hinge upon how many popularity contests we win? Isn't that exactly what St. Paul was battling in Galatia?

II. "*Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men?* If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ" (v. 10). Why? Because our heavenly Father doesn't work by the brownie-point system.

If our standing with God and with His Church depended upon pleasing Him and everyone else in thought, word and deed, none of us would ever stand a chance. We'd have to give up before we ever tried to serve the Lord.

But the Gospel tells us that our relationship with the Lord and His people isn't based on a merit system—not human merit, that is. It's based on what God our Father has done for us through our Lord Jesus Christ, the one "*who gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever.*" (v. 4-5). It's through His merit, through His blood and righteousness, we can stand here in the presence of the Most High God.

Remember what He said on the day of our Lord's baptism: "*You are My beloved Son, with You I am well pleased*" (Luke 3:22). Because Jesus is pleasing to the Father, through faith in Jesus so are we.

That is the truth. To say anything different is not the Gospel. Any way that seeks to make us pleasing to God because of what we have done, any system that would tell us we cannot be right with God until we have proven to Him we are worthy of His love, is not from God. Says Paul, "*Even if we*

or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.”

The Gospel of which Paul was called to be an apostle, of which you and I are called to be disciples, is the Good News of God’s forgiveness and unconditional love in Jesus crucified and risen. It’s a Gospel for sinners. It’s a gift. It can’t be earned or deserved. Because our sins have been placed upon Jesus, God is pleased with us. Because we are in Christ, He has declared us to be His daughters and sons.

Like the centurion, unworthy as we know we are, we can still pray, “Lord, just say the word, and your servant will be healed” (Luke 7:7). And He has. On the cross, arms outstretched, He lifted up his voice to high heaven and cried: “*Father, forgive them*” (Luke 23:34).

What peace comes from that gift, with that amazing grace. Peace with God, peace with our conscience, peace with those around us.

That’s why we don’t have to feel so paranoid and driven. We can rest and take comfort in the assurance that in Jesus God our Father is pleased with us. We can bask in His love and favour, in the light shining from His Son.

III. And precisely because of that very thing, we can seek to please Him and serve one another in humility, love and respect.

And that’s not meant to be doubletalk, you know. It’s simply two sides of the Gospel coin. Because our heavenly Father has shown us in the cross of Christ that He is pleased with us, that we don’t have to scramble around trying to get Him to like us or love us, we are free to serve Him and others purely for the love of it, purely for the joy of it.

It's like the hours kids spend making a birthday card for mom or dad. It isn't because they're trying to prove to her how much they love her. It isn't because they're trying to gain her approval. It isn't because they're afraid that if they don't do it just right, she is going to be unhappy with them and make their lives miserable. They put all that energy into working with paper and scissors and crayons because they love her and know how much she loves them. They bring it to the dining room table with a smile on their faces because they know that even before they take it out from behind their back to give it to her, she is already pleased with them, already delights in them, already loves them with a forever love.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, your heavenly Father wants you to know how much He loves you, too. He wants you to be able to serve Him and serve others freely, knowing that, in Christ, He delights in you and loves you with an everlasting love, a love that will never be withdrawn, a love that will never evaporate, even if every one else's does. And even if that service doesn't bring accolades from man, God will be glorified, and that's really what counts.

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