



LAKWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH:  
Rev. Terence A. Lucarelli  
June 20, 2010

*ALL IN THE FAMILY*  
Galatians 3:23-29  
Father's Day

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Ann Snow sent me a Prayer for Fathers and when I read it, well, I thought of my dad. I want to share it with you:

Mender of toys, leader of boys, changer of fuses, kisser of bruises.  
Bless him, dear Lord.

Mover of couches, soother of ouches, pounder of nails, teller of tales.  
Reward him, O Lord.

Hanger of screens, counselor of teens, fixer of bikes, chastiser of tykes.  
Help him, O Lord.

Raker of leaves, cleaner of eaves, dryer of dishes, fulfiller of wishes.  
Bless him, O Lord.



My daughter, Kerry, back quite a few years ago would make comments comparing me to Bill Cosby. No, it wasn't because I was a comedian ... I'll leave that up to those professionals who sit out there in the congregation. Do you remember The Cosby Show that aired back in the 80's and early 90's? Do you remember the Huxtable family? The show focused on an affluent African-American family living in Brooklyn, New York. Dr. Heathcliff Huxtable wore those great sweaters around the house and always knew the right thing to say in any situation. So, I guess I'm not really sure WHY Kerry compared me to Cosby ... I never wore great sweaters.

Bill Cosby was the keynote speaker at the commencement ceremonies for the Ohio State University a couple of years ago. In his address, one of Cosby's main points was the fact that people who we deem to be inferior to us have something to teach us. Cosby challenged the new graduates to take time to interview the custodians when they arrive at their respective places of employment. Cosby came from humble roots, but he acknowledges that he learned much from those persons in society who are often considered to be less important.



I can remember one of the custodians at my Junior High School. The school was just a quick bike ride up one hill and down the other, and the school was a great place to ride our bikes! Wally always had to work on Saturday. We'd see him around the buildings, and occasionally he'd ask us to help him move chairs or something and we'd always comply .... because, Wally would then let us into the gym to shoot some hoops. Now the reality was, Wally was really breaking the rules! He had no authority to let us in the school after hours. No, I don't think he was using us just to get some of his work done, Wally loved kids and as long as we didn't go running in the halls, or get into mischief, he'd let us play in the gym.

Times were different back then, for sure, but if we would have contacted the principal about using the school after hours we would have had to fill out a request form, have proof of insurance and parental consent. Then there would have to be approval from a list of people in official positions. It's not that educators don't love kids, they are responsible to the local community for the security of the school. Like all good institutions, they have their rules.



In Akron, I belonged to the local YMCA for a few years when we first arrived in town. Depending on what program you purchased, you had certain benefits. Everyone could play ball in the gym, run on the indoor running track or use the swimming pool. But there were separate shower rooms and other facilities, like the racquetball courts, weight room, steam room and saunas that were restricted. The level of your membership program determined the benefits you received.

We need rules to live by ... they provide order and discipline. Unfortunately they sometimes exclude people because of economic status. But there are other ways of distinguishing people too: race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, politics or social status.



There was a faction of folks at the Church of Galatia who believed that in order to be a member of the household of God, you needed to follow very specific rules. If you happened to be a Gentile Christian, well, the Jewish Law, as laid down by Moses, was pretty clear cut ... you had to abide by them ALL ... OR YOU WERE OUT! However, on to the scene walks Paul. He makes it very clear to his Jewish brothers and sisters that it is NOT living under the LAW that determines who belongs ... rather it is your FAITH. "For in Jesus Christ you are all children of God through FAITH."

For Paul, SPIRITUALITY takes precedence over RELIGION.

It's not following a system of rules, laws, policies and traditions that makes you a child of God ... it is your FAITH.

The Greek word for "faith" in this instance is "PIS-TAS."

One little boy in Sunday School was asked the question: What is faith? and quick as a flash he replied, "Believing something you know isn't true."

I don't know what you feel about it, but "faith" is definitely believing in something we don't understand ... God is beyond our understanding. Faith is defined in that classic way: "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." But folks, the only way to do that is through the indwelling Spirit of God. "For in Jesus Christ you are ALL children of God through FAITH."

It has nothing to do with where you come from, who you know, who you are related to, or what practices and customs you subscribe to. FAITH transcends our culture, our heritage, our place of origin, our systems, even our rules.

I am not saying that we don't have an identity. Each of us has a history, experience in a particular context, and that has undeniably contributed to who we are. But, Paul was advocating the importance of inclusiveness. I don't know about you, but for ME it's hard enough to make it in this complex world without religion being just another organization that focuses on ways we are different.

Have you ever been excluded from a group or an organization?

Do you know what it feels like to be left out?



Kenny was a young man in the youth group at my church in Colorado. Kenny played football for Centennial High and was an outstanding linebacker for the school. He received all kinds of honors his senior year and was being courted by several Division I schools in Colorado and in the neighboring states. Kenny had a problem though ... a learning disability that affected his grades in school and his college entrance exam scores. Basically Kenny was told by the NCAA that he would be ineligible to play anywhere his freshman year because they couldn't project he would be able to make the required grade point average. The news devastated him and as a result he never played college football, all because of some stupid ruling. What the NCAA didn't take into consideration was the fact that during football season Kenny always excelled in school. Football motivated him to do well in class.

Those of you who have experienced the pain of being excluded because of rules and/or practices know the feeling. You feel inferior or discriminated against. You aren't able to pursue your dreams or participate in the areas of life that have meaning for you.



I always liked the story of "Rudy." I'm sure most of you are familiar with Rudy's story. He was the young man who dreamed to play football at Notre Dame as a "walk-on." He worked hard, followed all the rules. However, his pursuit of playing at Notre Dame was a constant struggle of missing cuts, bumping up against oppressive systems and being told by most everyone that he should just "give it up." He didn't give up and made the scout team his Junior and Senior year just on sheer determination. Unfortunately his small build – 5'6" and 165 pounds – and only being on the scout team kept him from ever dressing for a game ... that is until the very last game of his senior year. Rudy's teammates convinced Coach Dan Devine to let him dress for the game against Georgia Tech and even let him in as a defensive end with only a few seconds left ... of all things ... they are usually huge! He got to play two plays and on the second play and last of the game, he sacked GT quarterback Rudy Allen. It was the defining moment in his life as his teammates carried him off the field following the game.

Paul is saying to us here that when it comes to faith, EVERYONE is Rudy. No one is excluded. ALL those who "believe" are INCLUDED. "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."



I believe the reason we tend to exclude people who are different than ourselves is simply due to fear. We don't trust people we don't know or we avoid those who beat to a different drum. We are comfortable with certain known standards, ways of dress, speech, commonality, cultural norms, etc., etc. Therefore we avoid strangers and are reluctant to include people in our life ... especially in our church ... that we don't know.



Charles Plumb, a U.S. Naval Academy graduate, was a jet pilot in Vietnam. After 75 combat missions, his plane was destroyed by a surface-to-air missile. Plumb ejected and parachuted into enemy hands. He was captured and spent 6 years in a communist Vietnamese prison. He survived the ordeal and now lectures on lessons learned from that experience.

One day, when Plumb and his wife were sitting in a restaurant, a man at another table came up and said, "You're Plumb! You flew jet fighters in Vietnam from the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk! You were shot down!"

"How in the world did you know that?" asked Plumb."

I packed your parachute," the man replied.

Plumb gasped in surprise and gratitude.

The man pumped his hand and said, "I guess it worked!"

Plumb assured him, "It sure did."

Plumb couldn't sleep that night, thinking about that man. Plumb says, "I kept wondering what he might have looked like in a Navy uniform: a white hat, a bib in the back, and bell-bottom trousers. I wonder how many times I might have seen him and not even said 'Good morning, how are you?' or anything because, you see, I was a fighter pilot and he was just a sailor."

Plumb thought of the many hours that sailor had spent on a long wooden table in the bowels of the ship, carefully weaving the shrouds and folding the silks of each chute, holding in his hands each time the fate of someone he didn't know. Now when Plumb speaks, he asks his audience, "Who's packing your parachute?"

Everyone has someone who provides what they need to make it through the day. Plumb also points out that he needed many kinds of parachutes when his plane was shot down over enemy

territory. He needed his physical parachute, his mental parachute, his emotional parachute, and his spiritual parachute.

Folks, we are ALL in the SAME family.

And everyone of us needs a spiritual parachute.

It isn't a particular organization that will save us.

It isn't a set of rules, or customs or creeds or traditions.

It is our faith in God and our trust in others, many of whom we never see. Yes, we NEED each other!

And it is this realization that nothing less than FAITH makes US and ALL others ... CHILDREN OF GOD ... ALL IN THE FAMILY.

Amen and Amen.