

June 6, 2010

## Galatians 1:11-24

*For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I 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 his grace, was pleased to reveal his 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 regions 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."***

**24 And they glorified God because of me.**

Something strange happened one day to Saul of Tarsus,  
Jew extraordinaire,  
Super Pharisee,  
Advancer beyond many of the same age;  
Zealous man of God.

Stranger still is that he seemed to know nothing about the fateful journey to Damascus.  
(The one Luke wrote about in Acts 9;  
the original "seeing the light" moment  
The one where Saul started out,  
"breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord,")

The one where he, "went to the high priest and asked him for letters  
to the synagogues at Damascus--  
That's because if he found anybody who "belonged to the Way,  
men or women,  
he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."  
He must have received the blessing of the high priest and so off he went,

And he had almost made it when, "suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.  
He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him,"

"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

No longer “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord,”  
He asked, “Who are you, Lord?”  
The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”  
How come *Paul* didn’t tell that story of the trip to Damascus  
About how he was blinded by the bright light  
About how he heard the words of one he thought to be Jesus?

From Paul’s own hand it looks more like he went  
AWOL, from Judaism.  
you know, “over the hill”,  
“absent without leave.”

He claimed that, “when God, who had set me apart before I was born  
and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his 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...”

He would have been safe in Arabia.  
Judaism had not made large inroads into Arabia and Christianity was just another  
mystery religion,  
a new fad.

Lately I’ve grown less fond of the  
Damascus Road, or the “Paul saw the light story,”  
And more fond of the, “God, who had set me apart before I was born  
and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me,  
so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles,” story.

I like the mystery.  
I don’t need the phenomenon.  
I like the idea of the Spirit of God working nearly in secret  
Inside of Paul, quietly pummeling the walls of his soul  
And finally smashing through.

We have a pretty good idea about what happened next,  
And after that, and later on.  
The adventures, the journeys, the letters that he wrote.

Sometimes I think that we have to have a story as good as Paul’s  
To get us moving; and what I want to tell you this morning is that  
You do.

Oh don’t be so modest.  
Just ask yourself this simple question  
Why are you here this morning?

Oh I have made a decent living for a lot of years telling my story  
In fits and starts, but I haven't begun to tell you my story.

(Don't worry; I'm not going to start now!)

Only if anyone had a reason to believe, to trust  
In the grace and mercy of God,  
I must surely be among-- anyone.

But not just me.  
For we are all in it together and we all have a piece of the humble pie  
That merits that grace and mercy, because your story  
Is based upon the fact that somebody told you,  
Or you read, or you saw the movie about another person  
Or persons  
Who seemed to live beyond even the Christian hope

Someone like Saul of Tarsus, who we would come to know as Paul,  
who came to believe that,  
God had set him apart before he was born--  
Just like he had with Jeremiah ben Hilkiah of Anathoth in the land of Benjamin,  
who once confessed that he believed that God had said to him,

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
and before you were born I consecrated you;  
I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

Like Jeremiah, Paul believed that, God had set him apart before he was born--  
and called him through his grace, and was pleased to reveal  
the sacred story of his Son to him.

It may be that your story is not so dramatic  
As that of Jeremiah or Paul  
It may be that your story or my story will not sell  
A million copies or win the Pulitzer Prize  
But it is a worthy story just the same and no less valuable

The hard part is believing that because its like getting something for nothing.  
(except the "nothing" is more valuable than anything I know of.)  
If I may offer a crude example, it's like winning the lottery--  
In a way . . .

Or as Jesus said, it's like finding a valuable pearl among many pearls of less worth,  
Such that you must sell everything you had to buy it.  
Or unexpectedly finding a treasure buried in the field you were plowing.

Your story is like that-- give it some considerable thought and

Without a doubt you will discover again  
God working against the walls of your soul and mine  
Just as he did with Jeremiah,  
And Paul,  
So God works in us.