

May 28, 2017 – Easter 7

*“Bearing Witness: Bewitched or Enchanted”* © - Rev. Seth Jones

*Scripture: Galatians 3:1-9, 23-29*

When I was a kid, one of my favorite TV shows was *“Bewitched”*, with Elizabeth Montgomery and Dick York. Elizabeth Montgomery played Sam, who was a witch, unbeknownst to her husband Darrin. The show revolved around Sam, who, with a wiggle of her nose, either fixed things that had gone wrong, or made things worse by trying to use magic where it didn’t apply. Sam was generally interested in doing good – her mother often reminded her she was a good witch, but sometimes she resorted to *bewitching* people in order to maintain an illusion. Other times, she *enchanted* people in order to help them better see what was really true about a particular person or situation.

Today, Paul says to the wayward Galatian church,

*“You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?” (Gal 3:1)*

Paul is writing to the church in Galatia to tell them they have been led astray by a dangerous and destructive illusion. He implies what the illusion is when he asks,

*“Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard?”*

People have come into the Galatian community, false teachers, who have begun teaching that all the 613 laws of the Old Testament must be followed in order to be a true follower of Christ, the Messiah.

Throughout Easter, we have been exploring, *bearing witness to*, how the disciples and the early church continually and constantly expanded and pushed the outer boundaries of who was included and what was required of those who wished to be a part of the new, enchanted world of Christ’s Resurrection. We have seen Peter baptize Cornelius, who was a Roman centurion, and Philip run to and baptize the Ethiopian Eunuch. We heard James and Peter and the other disciples decide on behalf of the Gentiles by dropping all the Jewish requirements of the faith, and last week, Judy detailed Paul’s journeys throughout the region as the Apostle to the Gentiles.

The early church was defined by this rapid, open, and welcoming expansion which included all kinds of people from all kinds of backgrounds and regions of the world. Those who joined the church, those who chose to follow Jesus, did so because they had been blessed with a new way to see the world. They were, quite simply, *enchanted* by the Resurrection worldview. A new way and a new life was made available to any and all. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians in his second letter,

*“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, s/he is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Cor 5:17).*

Into Galatia, came teachers who said quite the opposite of all this. Paul asks the Galatians,

*were you saved by the things you have done and are doing, or were you saved because of your faith in Christ?*

Because these are, at least from a human point of view, mutually exclusive. The church in Galatia bought the false teaching, we can surmise from Paul’s letter. These false teachers bewitched the Galatian church into an illusion, into a false worldview.

Paul does a brilliant thing to combat this false and disturbing turn of events. He challenges the bewitched worldview with an enchanted vision. He begins where any good Jewish person would begin, with the father of the faith – Abraham. Paul says,

*“Look at Abraham. Abraham didn’t receive the promises of God because of anything he did. No, Abraham believed and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.”*

In other words, because Abraham trusted God implicitly, he was welcomed into the family of God. It is worth going back to Genesis and reading about Abraham. Good, upright, and moral are not phrases that come to mind when we read his story. Any goodness we attribute to Abraham is because of what God did for him.

We know Abraham sees from a new perspective, a God oriented worldview, a non-dual place as the mystics call it, because Abraham is granted a fantastic vision of the stars as his descendants (*Gen 15:5*). God opens Abraham’s eyes to a crowded future of believers. Paul says of Abraham, quoting Scripture,

*“All the Gentiles will be blessed in you.”*

In this non-dual vision,

*“there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28).*

Let’s take Paul seriously for a moment here. What does it mean to you to be ‘male’? What does it mean to be ‘female’? Or to reverse it, what does it mean to you to not be ‘female’ or ‘male’? What does it mean to you to be ‘American’ and not, say, ‘Iranian’, or ‘Afghani’, or ‘English’, or ‘German’? What does it mean to be ‘white’? What if you were no longer male or female? What would you be? What if you were no longer ‘white’?

What if you were no longer defined by these things? What if there were a better way to see the world?

See, Paul's challenge to the bewitched illusion that the Galatians were living under was to present an enchanted perspective that sees beyond the dualities and boundaries of the human perspective. Again in 2 Corinthians, Paul says,

*"So then, from now on we know no one from a human point of view, if indeed we have known Christ, from a human point of view, but now we know him this way no longer" (2 Cor 5:16).*

A Resurrection perspective, a God-centered mindset, a blessed vision, does not see the dualities of the human perspective. Those dualities are a clue that we have been bewitched. In Christ, we are instead enchanted to see a 'monist', or non-dual, world. In the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses repeats the Jewish creed several times,

*"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut 6:4).*

The Lord is one. It is how we are called to see the world, to see it as God sees it. This is the enchanted family of God that we are invited to be a part of today. In Christ, the boundaries that were put into place by the law have been dropped, the walls between people have come down. Now, as Paul says,

*"We are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Gal 3:27).*

Stop here for a moment, and reflect on what it means when a child can dress themselves.

Doesn't it mean they are growing up?

Doesn't it mean that they are growing beyond the need to be told what to do and to be subject to all the rules of the house? Doesn't it mean that one day, very soon, they will be an adult?

My friends Andy and Robin are planning on writing a book entitled, *Adulthood with Jesus: How Jesus Teaches Us to Be an Adult*. We grow up when we *clothe ourselves* in Christ. Part of being an adult is seeing through the illusions and things people have told us to do and be when we were younger.

*Who has bewitched you?*

Who has told you what to do and what to believe? Paul suggests we can tell when we are living in a bewitched illusion by paying attention to how we view the world and the people in it. In a bewitched world, we separate out people by race and color, by social status and wealth, by what is between our legs and who we sleep with, by whether they have earned their keep or are just loafing around taking from the system. We see ourselves and others as being worthy only by the rules and social mores we and they

have fulfilled, the checkboxes we and they have marked off in our striving to be accepted by the human world.

This is an illusion. Many of us are bewitched by the times we live in. We are, in many ways, like the Galatians. I think this is always true, but each generation lives through it differently.

What if the polarization in our country today is, for us, we followers of the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ, a sign and a signal that we are just like the Galatians – bewitched by separation, dualities, division? It is not that differences don't matter. It is more that in a bewitched world, differences are a hotbed of conflict and an impetus for violence, where we try to force 'the other' to be like us, think like us, do what we tell them. Illusion and being bewitched are, I think, the default settings for our minds and souls.

The hard work, the working out of our faith, is reaching, seeking, and welcoming the enchanted world of Christ – a world where the veil is lifted and we no longer define people by their difference from us. *The Lord our God, the Lord is one.* We, because of our faith in Christ, are children of that One God. Just as we have seen the expanding church over these past few weeks, where the doors are thrown open to all, so also today, we see that we, the offspring of Abraham, are part of an ever-growing, ever-expanding, family of faith that descends through the ages, as many as there are stars in the heavens, of people who are now or will be in the future - the enchanted Jews, Greeks, European, African, peoples of the Americas, enslaved, freed, male, female, black, white, brown, yellow, red, rich, poor - heirs according to the promises of God.

Who has bewitched you? See through the illusion.

Will you be enchanted with the vision, the hope, and the future of Jesus Christ? Amen.