

**A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church**  
**By Chris Fillingham**  
**“The Pot of Gold”**  
**5<sup>th</sup> in the series *Becoming the Church***  
**Galatians 5:16-26**

Today is the last Sunday of Easter, and it is also the last Sunday in our series on “*Becoming the Church.*”

We’ve been looking at the story of Jesus’ followers becoming the church. And we’re doing that in order to help us understand what it means for us to be the church now...

in this time and place...

with the questions we are asking today.

Among all the competing voices, and stories, and paradigms, and dogma out there today about being the church... we need to know and remember, what has been at the very heart of being the church since the beginning.

And here’s what we’ve seen along the way in this series.

1) The church began as a community with one central conviction, a conviction that centered around Jesus. Since the very beginning we have believed that somehow, in Jesus’ birth, and in his life, and in his death, and resurrection, God has done something unique and profound in the life of the world ... something that has affected the cosmos and is reconciling all of creation back to God.

And because of that, among all the shifting theologies and competing controversies in the earliest centuries of the church, there was one central conviction that held their life together, one claim that the martyrs were willing to die for: **Jesus is Lord.**

2) The next week we saw that early on, a radical inclusion began to shape this community. It started when Phillip baptized an Ethiopian eunuch... breaking with all their traditions and scriptures. Pretty soon it became clear that God was including people that the community thought were not fit to be members in the household of God. As Peter later puts it, “God has shown me that I should never call anyone impure or unclean.” (Acts 10:28). So, a radical inclusion begins to define the church’s life.

3) But in order for that to be lived out, some hard questions had to be answered. And so, our third week, we saw how the church has always had to be a community that practices the art of discernment.

We talked about how true spiritual wisdom is found when we hold together both **the outer authority** of the scripture and tradition, with the **inner authority** of experience and reason... the inner authority of what we experience God doing and what simply makes sense in light of what we know.

We don’t ignore one or the other, but we hold them all together... to find true spiritual wisdom...

Just like the church did at the Jerusalem conference when they made the ***incredibly controversial decision*** that...

the Gentiles did not have to change their identity,

they didn't have to convert,  
they didn't have to change from the category of impure to pure...in order to become part of the household of God.

Since the very beginning, the church has always had to ***practice the art of discernment.***

4) Last week we saw how God was calling the church not just to include, but to ***become a community of belonging...*** for all kinds of broken people. In the church, in the household of God, there can be no stepchildren, no second class citizens. And so, Paul calls Peter to the carpet when Peter starts to treat some people as "less than." ... as not quite full members.

And Paul challenges the church in Antioch, and in Galatia, and the church in our time, to begin to recognize that all the identities and labels that separate us... have to take a backseat in the life of the church.

In the church there can no longer be Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, because all are made one in Christ. ***And that was a radical new idea in Paul's world!***

It was a radical idea that unraveled the very fabric of the traditional Roman household. Because in the household of God, there is only one thing that matters. We are made one in Christ.

The church is called to be more than welcoming,  
we are called to be a community of belonging... for every kind of person. Which means seeing those who are different than you as brothers and sisters.

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Today we're finishing this series by looking at the other side of that coin. You see, in a community where everyone can belong, it's easy to think that "everything goes..." that who we are and how we live doesn't matter.

But that's never been the case either. Becoming part of the household of God is open to everyone, ***but it also requires something of us.*** It calls all of us to a profound kind of life.

The problem is, we have often gotten the real aim of that life mixed up with categories of "pure and impure"

of "righteous and unrighteous"

of "fitting the norms of identity and not fitting the norms of identity"

of "doin' it right and doin' it wrong"

***the very kind of categories that the church rejected at the very beginning.***

In order to understand what is required of us... In order to understand what our aim is in our life together... we have to ask a different kind of question.

The question isn't:

Am I doing the right things?

Or am I following the right rules?

Or am I fitting into the norms?

And the question isn't:

Do I believe the right stuff?

Or am I keeping my spiritual practices up?

Those questions may have their place.

But there is a deeper question that gets to the heart of what should define the church's life together... that should define our ethics...

a question that gets to the true heart of the church's spirituality.

And it's a very simple question.

The question is this:

***Why? Why do you do what you do?***

***Why do you do what you do?***

Why do you turn the TV on at the same time every night?

Why do you munch on snacks while you watch TV at night, even though you know it's not good for you? ...Or is that just me that does that?

Why do you spend so many hours at the office?

Why do you spend your money the way you do?

***Why do you do, what you do?***

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In the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century, the church began to move from being persecuted on the margins of society to the mainstream. It went from a persecuted, small group of scattered communities, to the official religion of the Roman Empire.

At first, it was nice to not be under fire. They didn't have to worry so much... But in that new place of prominence... a deep spiritual ailment began to affect the church. Since it was no longer costly to become a Christian, the deep commitment to Christ and the rigorous spiritual life of the church began to atrophy.

As this began to happen, more and more deeply committed Christians looked for another way... a way to flee all the trappings of this new power and prestige. And so, they move out into the deserts of Egypt and Palestine. These people we now call the desert monastics, the desert fathers and mothers.

You've heard me talk about them before.

They moved out to the desert and lived these austere lives because they were trying to flee from the influence of their society...

the demons of power and wealth

of prestige and position...

They were trying to escape the moral and spiritual decay that they saw taking place in the mainstream church.

But something happened while they were out there in the desert. They began to discover that they had carried their demons with them. Leaving society behind, living with strict rules and practices, didn't automatically make them free from all those temptations and all those demons they had known in their former life.

But what it did, is help them begin to recognize those things more clearly... and especially in their own soul.

Living in the desert... often in isolation... they began to see that the demons they needed to fight weren't "out there" in someone else,

but deep inside themselves.

They began to see how they have been controlled all along by these drives and needs that they didn't even know were there... these drives and needs that they called "the passions."

Now, don't get that mixed up with our word passion today... which we think of as a good thing. We like to talk about "following your passion" and "being passionate."

But they mean something very different when they talk about "the passions."

The passions in the early centuries of the church are those patterns that seem to be controlling us.

The passions are the things that drive for power and control, even in our own little sphere of life.

They are these drives and needs that we all have for affection and esteem, which make us act in a certain way.

And these drives for security and survival that make us do certain things.

Power and Control

Affection and Esteem

Security and Survival

And these drives and needs that they call the passions *are controlling us...* in ways we do not recognize most of the time.

And so the desert fathers and mothers became masters at diagnosing the soul... and recognizing that... these passions... are so often, "***why you do what you do.***"

**They are the reason... you** snap at your kids.

Or hide from your real life, by trying to live in a fantasy.

They are the reasons you compulsively look at your phone,

or check your Facebook status... rather than just be present with people in the room with you... or simply sit in a moment of solitude.

The passions are why you:

avoid,

push,

control,

hide,

worry.

The problem is, we're pretty unaware of these passions, these drives, most of the time. So we go about our lives, controlled by them.

The passions are in the driver's seat... and we don't even recognize it.

We're passive slaves to our passions.

One of the desert monastics puts it this way: "It was well said once by a wise person, that the soul has as many masters as it has passions... People are slaves to whatever masters them."

We are slaves... to our passions... and don't even know it most of the time.

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The desert monastics aren't the first ones to talk about this.

Paul was a master spiritual mystic and guide. He describes this in all kinds of ways in his letters. When he writes to the Romans he says, "The desire to do good is inside of me, but I can't seem to do it. I don't do the good that I want to do, but I keep doing the evil I don't want to do..."

Paul is describing the passions...

the same thing the desert monastics describe...

the same thing that Augustine describes...

the same thing that countless Christian spiritual teachers have described... We are driven by these... impulses... by the passions.

We have our own demons that haunt us.

When Paul writes to the Galatians, he talks about it in a different way, but he's getting at the same thing.

"Be guided by the Spirit and you won't carry out your selfish desires. A person's selfish desires are set against the Spirit... Those who belong to Christ Jesus... have crucified the self with its passions and its desires."

In other words, dealing with the passions, or what he sometimes calls the flesh, those selfish desires, is at the very heart of the gospel... and one of the central issues of our spiritual lives.

Central to the Christ-life is the practice of putting these passions to death... those controlling patterns.

And the only way to do that is to begin to pay attention... to start to recognize, "*Why you do what you do.*"

***Because until you begin to recognize the passions at work in your soul... you will never be free from them  
to begin to embody  
the fruit of the Spirit.***

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Some of you know that I've been fighting planter fasciitis all school year. I haven't been able to run since the end of August. I've been trying all kinds of things to help it heal.

I've done stretches religiously.

I've taken Advil like an addict.

I've iced my foot.

I've bought multiple new shoes.

I've even worn a boot on my foot while I slept at night for months...

But still, it isn't going away.

So, finally I broke down and decided to follow the doctor's advice and got these expensive custom-made inserts for my foot. I went in 3 weeks ago to have a mold of my foot made. And so, I was excited to go in this last Wednesday and finally pick them up.

Now, if you've done this before, you know they tell you to bring in your shoes with you. So I brought in a few pairs that I wear most days... and the guy begins to rip out the inserts that are built into the shoe...which made me a little nervous. And then he puts in the new insert and has me try it on.

But when I do, it's so tight I can hardly get my foot in my shoe.

So I spent the next hour and half with him sanding down the insert, trying again, filling it back in, sanding it back down.... and the longer this whole charade went on, the more and more angry I got.

After seeing that it wasn't fitting, the guy working with me would just disappear...for 20 minutes at a time, and I'd have no idea what he was doing. I had no idea when he was coming back, or if it was going to work this time...

or if I just wasted all this money...

and I just kept getting angrier.

I tried to take a deep breath... but the waves of anger just kept coming back at me.

And the thing is, all that anger... it didn't help the process any. It just made me more miserable. All that anger just built up my own blood pressure and made me irritable.

*And I kept thinking that I wish I hadn't told him I was a pastor, because there wasn't anything in me that afternoon that you'd describe as fruit of the Spirit!*

The passion of anger was taking over... I was all out of peace, patience, kindness, gentleness... and the rest.

Now, I'm sure none of you have ever had an experience like that, because you all are such good Christians.

But I'm sorry to say, your pastor isn't.

I've got a long way to go...

Sure, I may have a seminary degree under my belt, and working on another one. I may be able to talk about the nuances of scripture, and theology, and ethics until you fall asleep from boredom.

But when it comes to what matters most, I've got a long way to go. And that is what we so often have misunderstood in the church.

The mark of Christian maturity is the fruit of the Spirit,  
not how much you know,  
or how well you follow the rules,  
not how many missionaries you support,  
or how many social justice causes you work for,  
not how much you sacrifice for others  
or how righteous you are.

As good as some of these things are, they are not primary.

The mark of Christian maturity is that famous list that Paul writes out in the midst of this letter, as he talks about crucifying the flesh with its passions and desires.... and tries to help the Galatians get their minds around what is required and what isn't required in the life of the church.

The mark of Christian maturity... is the degree to which we begin to embody **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.** The fruits of the Spirit are the real *aim* of the Christ-centered life.

It's the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

They are the things that those in the household of God... are called to cultivate and embody.

Our life together is not just about getting along...where anything goes. That's not the kind of belonging that defines the church. Instead, we're *all* invited to belong to a community that is cultivating, and planting, and fertilizing, and watering, and growing, and harvesting the fruits of the Spirit. **Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.**

These are the marks of the Christian life...

These are the things we can cultivate... when we learn to recognize the passions at work in us.

These are the things to look for in any community that claims to be the church.

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So as we draw this series to a close, what can we say about a community of Jesus followers becoming the church?

The church is rooted in the central conviction that Jesus is Lord...

while at the same time being a diverse, and welcoming, and including community... a community of belonging for all kinds of people...

a community that is willing to wrestle with hard questions and practice the art of discernment...

a community that is willing to take an honest look at itself... that's willing to face its fears and passions and demons hiding in the closet... in order that they might grow more fully into the life of God... cultivating among us the very fruit of the Spirit.

Dayspring, may we strive...

to become more fully...this kind of Church.

Amen.

Silent Reflection

"You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last..."

~Jesus (John 15:16)

Communion Prep:

*"When Jesus takes the cup on the evening before his death, it is not the cup of wrath, but the cup of blessings. It is the cup of a new and everlasting covenant, the cup that unites us with God and with one another in a community of love."* ~Henri Nouwen