

**OAKRIDGE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH****March 3, 2019****“Observe and Learn”**

Galatians 6: 11-18; Luke 9: 28-36

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Today we come to the end of our series of messages on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians. William Barclay writes that *ordinarily Paul only added his signature to the letter which the scribe wrote to his dictation*. Perhaps after all he has suffered, his fine motor skills are deteriorated and make it too hard to write, but now Paul takes up the pen himself to punctuate the important points of his letter: “*See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand!*”(v.11) It would be like us suddenly switching to CAPS (capital letters) in a letter or email to someone to say, “READ THIS, it is the critical part!” Paul summarizes what they need to see and understand. The people, the Judaizers, that have come to the Galatians trying to tell them they must first do certain things, like be circumcised, before they will be righteous before God are doing this for selfish reasons – they are distorting the gospel to fit their Jewish lifestyle, to keep from being persecuted as Christians, or to win the approval of God, “ ... but look, even the circumcised don’t obey the laws themselves”, Paul says – “... you don’t have to be “Jewish” first – you are righteous as Gentiles through the cross of Christ, the grace of God. It will be your ruin to follow their ways – observe and learn, they want you to follow their ways, but you were already following Christ by the Grace of God – hold on to that!”

The words *observe and learn* found their way into today’s message as I recalled a movie called “The Second Chance”(slide 2). It’s a story of two churches, one is wealthy, and called *the Rock*, the other is poor, called *Second Chance* – they are sister churches. The senior pastor of The Rock, Jeremiah, in his younger days was pastor at Second Chance and so there is a commitment to financially support the ministries of that church. Now the pastor of Second Chance, Jake, who was mentored by Jeremiah, speaks the truth less than diplomatically, and Jeremiah’s son, Ethan, as associate pastor at the Rock, and a former childhood friend to Jake is happy to give Jake an opportunity to speak – he gives him his ‘air time on the pulpit’ which turns into a less than appreciative speech that is published in the newspaper. That causes a strong reaction from the leadership resulting in significant changes for everyone. Jake is asking for more involvement, not just money - there goes the comfort zone.

The Board tells Jeremiah to clip Ethan’s wings, because Ethan takes too many risks – he doesn’t appreciate the politics of stability at a mega church like The Rock and so he needs to learn a lesson. When Jeremiah tells his son that he will be the one to go to Second Chance to get more involved, not the high school kids or the youth pastor, Ethan reminds his father of all the things he has accomplished for the Rock, “... attendance is up, offerings are up...” Jeremiah says, none of that is going to change...and Ethan goes on, “my book just came out...” did I mention Ethan is a rock star?–it’s all about his accomplishments... Jeremiah tells him,... it will be a good ministry experience,” and Ethan replies, “ Jake isn’t going to listen to me.” To which Jeremiah responds, “You’re not going there to fix anything, son, I just want you to observe and to learn...”

As Ethan observes, he wants to see changes – he wants it to fit into his idea of a successful church ... just like the Judaizers wanted for the Galatians .... And like them he lets his thoughts be known.

It seems it is not so uncommon ... there is always a need to observe and learn

Today is Transfiguration Sunday - the Sunday before the season of Lent begins, that 40 days that lead up to the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Our reading from Luke tells us even then, at this amazing event – the Transfiguration - there is a suggestion for making the scene “comfortable” so they can stay there – a regular place of worship ... by adding shelters/ places for worship.

This isn't the first time Jesus has gone up onto a mountain to pray, but it is the first time he takes Peter, John and James with him. And there is a reason that Jesus takes them along - to be witnesses to this very important event because it answers the question posed earlier in the chapter “who is Jesus?” Herod asks it (v7-9); and Jesus asked the disciples, “who do people say I am?” The speculations range from Elijah or another prophet or John the Baptizer reincarnated. So Jesus asks the disciples “who do you say I am?”, and Peter answers, “God's Messiah.” (vs. 20) – knowing who Jesus is, is central to the Gospel *for everyone* – so Jesus takes 3 of his disciples for a ‘mountain-top experience’ that they will one day have to tell. (3 of the gospels do tell.)

Luke writes that Jesus takes the three disciples into the mountain to pray, and it is while he is praying the Jesus changes, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. The other two gospels leave out prayer – in Matthew and Mark Jesus is transformed before their eyes. In Luke's account, it's as if Jesus has been praying for a while and the disciples have fallen asleep and they suddenly come awake to witness Jesus transformed talking to Moses and Elijah, who are also in glorious splendor, and Luke gives details about their conversation, something not mentioned in the other gospels.

For Luke the prayer is important because just going up the mountain is not enough – it is the prayer that means communion with God – that is what transforms – notice that Peter, James and John are only observers, not participants in the conversation – and they are not transformed. Moses represents the Law and Elijah the prophets, the things Jesus came to fulfill, and they are talking to Jesus about his ‘exodus’ from this world – as Moses exodus from Egypt set the people free from slavery, so Jesus' exodus from this world in Jerusalem will set people free from the slavery of sin; and the crucifixion will be the justice of God satisfied as the prophets told. Moses and Elijah are there to remind Jesus of the importance of his exodus, and to encourage him to go on. Jesus gets no encouragement from his disciples in this respect because they just don't understand the way of the cross.

And because Moses and Elijah are there the disciples can see Jesus is not a reincarnation of a past hero, he is much more than the human heroes of the Old Testament - Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah.

God says that very clearly, “This is my Son – Listen to him.” – because the disciples were not listening...

Just before their trip up the mountain Jesus told the disciples that he “must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up” (v. 22).

And the first thing Peter blurts out is an alternate plan that does not fit with what Jesus said. *As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”* Luke writes, *(He did not know what he was saying.)* (vs 33) - Silence would have been the better option.

Observe and Learn

A cloud covers them, "and they were afraid as they entered into the cloud" (v. 34b) - terrified because they understand the cloud as the presence of God. Only the High Priest is allowed to come into God's presence—and he only on the Day of Atonement (Hebrews 9:7). To look on God's face is to die (Exodus 33:20). Who knows

what will happen to them now that they are in God's presence—they do not know God like Moses and Elijah and Jesus do..... They are afraid.

And a voice is heard, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” It is as if Peter never spoke – no one is listening to him. And it is over. Jesus is alone. Now here Luke ends by writing that the disciples did not tell about this event in those days, while the other two gospels say, “Jesus told them not to tell until he was raised from the dead.”

They were invited up the mountain to observe, then they were told to listen [to Jesus], learn... not to speak until they understood what Jesus has accomplished as the Son of God, the Messiah.

#### Observe and Learn

It is not so different in our experiences...we talked about this at the Bible study this week, ... how churches make rules that say we are in or out as Christians ... no drinking, no smoking, no dancing .... Different denominations value different things.

I saw this saying, “We do not see things as they are, we see things as we are”. Do you think this is true?

It seems to be human nature to want to organize our world in a way that is comfortable with our experiences or with how we understand things. Rather than observe and learn, we like to observe and readjust to our way of thinking...

Here is an example:

What do you think this symbol stands for? –It’s a capital L in a red circle with a slash through it – indicating no “L”. Would you guess that it means NOEL... when I saw it I was working on this message and thinking of Law versus Grace – so I thought maybe it means no Law – (Now just imagine if we had no Law. We do need law – it shows us where we are sinful and leads us to grace.)

Do you see how quickly it happens, we like to turn everything into what is understandable from our framework of experience.

We have so many different influences in our lives and somehow we have to make sense of it all, to nurture relationships, and to build community in a healthy way ...how do we do that?

Observe and learn, watch what God is doing....

In a commentary on Galatians, theologian and spiritual director Howard Baker wrote, ... *being formed by the Spirit into the image of Christ ... is the Spirit’s work, in the Spirit’s way, and in the Spirit’s time. The Spirit keeps us free and fruitful.*

*The life of faith is dominated by being rather than doing – being present to God, being aware of his presence in and with us, being grateful for his care, and being responsive to his love.*

*Spiritual formation is always in the context of community. God’s forming work in an individual is extremely personal but not private. Our freedom and formation stories are to be shared for the enriching of our brothers and sisters. In doing so, we both challenge and encourage one another. Paul in his letter speaks powerfully, yet lovingly, into the lives of his fellow Christians in order to build a community without distinction and hierarchies in which all are one in Christ Jesus. (Living with God Bible,325)*

In *The Second Chance*, Ethan learns that ‘comfort’ is sinking sand and he shared that – it turned out that all 3 pastors had to observe and learn – to see what God was doing. The same rules do not apply to every situation.

We have to understand 'the who' we would take care of – but more importantly we have to observe what God is doing, and learn that neither Laws, circumcision, nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!

I wonder if Paul saw that same glory as the disciples on the mountain top, when he was struck down on the road to Damascus – they like Paul, had to observe and learn - understand who Jesus is – the Son of God – and before they can share the Gospel they must wait for God's timing – this means receiving the Spirit through Jesus Christ.

When people can see the transformation in them – the glory of God in their faces, then they will be/are witnesses.

As we approach a new season of Lent we too are invited to come up to the mountain to pray, to engage in conversation with the Lord. We are invited to observe and learn, watch where the Lord is working in our own homes, neighbourhoods, workplaces, and cities, and even around the world. We are invited to listen to the Word as it tells us what Jesus taught us in his life and his death and his resurrection. We are invited to be transformed by Jesus Christ, and when we understand what God has done and is doing we are invited to be witnesses.

*Now Paul ends...enough....From now on, let no one make trouble...*

*May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen. (v. 17a, 18)*

All glory be to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

*Sources:*

William Barclay. *Daily Study Bible (Rev. ed.), The Acts of the Apostles, and The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians (1976)*  
<http://www.textweek.com>

The Bible (NRSV)(1989)

The Living with God Bible (NRSV)(2005)

Focus Quote: Understanding is the basis of care. What you would take care of you must first understand, whether it be a petunia or a nation.

*Dallas Willard*