
GETTING IT BACKWARD

Dyslexia is a learning disability that causes letters to sort of jump around when reading

- For the person with dyslexia, the words sometimes appear backward.
 - for example, “saw” becomes “was”.
 - Did you hear about the dyslexic atheist who didn’t believe there really was a dog?
- Sometimes, dyslexia can even cause words to appear in the wrong order.

In today’s Gospel reading, JESUS is talking to a group of Jews and they seem to have theological dyslexia,

- and JESUS is telling them that they’re getting it backward.

I’d like start today’s sermon with some Bible study.

v. 31 says *“To the Jews who had believe in HIM...”*

- Does that mean they don’t believe in HIM now?
 - We don’t know, but JESUS proceeds to encourage HIS faithful followers with these words:
“If you hold to MY teaching, you are really MY disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Truth is important, but sometimes it’s hard to know what the truth is.

- Are eggs good for you?
- It seems that in our politics also, truth is up for grabs.
 - Truth seems to have become whatever the party you support says,
 - and lies are whatever the opposing side says.
- We, though, should seek to discover what really is true and then support the truth, even if it isn’t what we like.

I was thinking the other day about how often people will decide what the thing is that they want to be the truth, and then spend time finding those things that tell you what you want the truth to be is true.

- Even if it is not. Even if there is plenty of evidence to tell you that your truth is false.
- People will make sure the only listen to those who say what they want to be true, and ignore what contradicts their desired truth.

The Jews had come to believe that the Gentiles were unclean and not deserving of GOD’S love and mercy.

- In Romans, Paul comes along and points out a number of times that the scriptures that the Jews knew and believed said that GOD had chosen the in order to bless the Gentiles and bring them into faith in GOD.
 - That didn’t sit so well, with a number of Jews.

In today’s gospel, the Jews replied to JESUS, *“We...have never been slaves of anyone.”*

Fact check: Exodus 1:8-11:

Then a new king, to whom Joseph (the ancestor of the Jews) meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. “Look,” he said to his people, “the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.” (Sounds like something we might hear today, isn’t it?)

So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor. (Pharoah made the Jews slaves.)

- The Exodus was one of the two greatest events in the history of Israel where the Jews were led from their slavery in Egypt.
 - Seems odd that they would have forgotten that.
 - Not only that, they seemed to forget that the Romans currently occupied their land.

The problem for the Jews was the same problem that a lot of churches have today.

- They were trusting in the wrong person.
 - “*We are Abraham’s descendants,*” they said.
- Their claim was that because GOD had made a covenant with Abraham—“*I will be your GOD, and you will be MY people*”—they were covered, no matter what they believed or did.
 - They were like parents who bring their child for baptism, but never come back, because they believe that baptism is like eternal life insurance.
 - (Actually, baptism does not guarantee salvation. JESUS said, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. Whoever does not believe will perish.”
 - So, salvation hinges on faith, not on baptism, so we have to do all we can to make sure our and our children’s faith is strong.)
- So, here are these Jews claiming that because GOD had made that covenant with their ancestor, Abraham, they were already set.

But JESUS gives them the correct focus: “*So if the SON sets you free, you will be free indeed.*”

Then there are churches who are looking in the wrong places.

Romans 3:20 says, “*Therefore no one will be declared righteous in GOD’S sight by the works of the law.*”

- Part of the problem for the Jews to whom JESUS was speaking was that they thought it was the things that they did that would save them.

One of Martin Luther’s objections to the Roman Catholic Church of his day is that the emphasis they taught was that it is the things you do that will save you from sin.

- Practices like confession and penance, giving offering, going to worship, and so on, where the focus is on you and the actions you decided to do will bring you the freedom that only GOD can offer.
 - Luther wanted to keep the focus always on what JESUS does, rather than our own choices.

Many churches today argue over how the church should do its ministry.

- Should we rent out more space or keep it for ourselves?
- Should we only evangelize the rich who might keep us open?
- Should we sell advertising space in our newsletter?
- Should we try to get a church to close and merge with us?
 - These are all visions I’ve actually heard churches consider.
 - But their getting it backward.
 - There looking to their own choices—their own priorities to save and direct their church.

The vision upon which they (and we) should focus on is GOD’S vision.

- At our stewardship event a few years ago, we talked about the three mission priorities: Worship, Community, and Support.
- We talked about how these three priorities fulfill GOD’S Great Commandment—to love GOD above all else and to love our neighbors as ourselves.
 - When we keep our focus on what GOD is calling us to do, going to the places that GOD wants us to go,
 - we will receive GOD’S blessing as we partner in the mission of GOD’S kingdom in the world.

“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

- Too many Christians today find themselves bending their knees the wrong way. Comedian Steven Wright poses the question, “Did you ever wonder what chairs would look like if your knees bent the other way?”
 - The Jews of JEUSU’ day and many people today, bend their knees the wrong way or fail to bend them at all.
 - The message the world seems to tell us that we should stand up taller.
 - You know what’s best.
 - Your desires should come first.
 - It’s all about you.
 - No wonder so many call it “my church” rather than the “church that I attend?”
 - It’s easy to forget that it is GOD’S Church and we are part of GOD’S mission.
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Over the years of my ministry, I’ve noted a change in the way we talk GOD and how we make GOD the object of our sentences instead of the subject.

- We talk about our mission for GOD.
 - That puts us into competition with other churches.
 - Who has the better mission for GOD?
 - Is it St. Andrew Lutheran Church’s mission for GOD?
 - Or Whittier Community Church’s mission for GOD?
 - Or St. Mary of the Assumption’s mission for GOD?
 - Yet, when we make GOD the subject of our sentences, things change.
 - Now we’re in partnership with each other.
 - It’s GOD’S mission through St. Andrew.
 - And God’s mission through Whittier Community.
 - And God’s mission through St. Mary of the Assumption.
 - We’re on the same team, working to carry out GOD’S mission.
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Our attitude should be that of bending our knees in humility.

- It’s GOD’S Church.
 - It’s GOD’S mission.
 - It’s GOD’S vision.
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In I Corinthians 1:2, Paul writes, *“For the foolishness of GOD is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of GOD is stronger than human strength.”*

- That sounds backward, doesn’t it?
 - But as JESUS’ disciples, we are invited to get it backward:
 - to see that the weakness of CHRIST, allowing HIMSELF to be crucified, reveals the strength of GOD,
 - raising HIM even from the dead;
 - to see that the foolishness of CHRIST,
 - caring for those who can’t return what we do for them,
 - including in our ministry to those who we would otherwise avoid,
 - giving away our wealth and our time to help those in need, reveals the wisdom of GOD,
 - blessing us with purpose and meaning in our lives.

The world tries to tell us what to value, how to present ourselves, what to think about others.

- But the real freedom we find in JESUS comes when we decide to join in HIS mission,
 - and (sorry world), we’re choosing to get it backward.