

10-8 SermonA17Pentecost18

**Sunday Page Statement:**

There's a good reason why the religious elite of Jesus day regarded his teachings as *scandalous*. Their teachings had lost the spirit of freedom in the knowledge of God's steadfast love. Shackles of pietistic observances and a raft of religious rules replaced the kind of delight in the way of the Lord that King David demonstrated and promoted. Jesus had a mind and a heart to change that. Jesus came on the scene *scandalously* announcing and *scandalously* showing people that God's love doesn't depend on our religious observance or cultural credibility. Some people weren't pleased with that; others found a whole new way to live.

Long before Saturday Night Live, long before The Simpsons, long before internet memes ... there was *Rowen and Martin's Laugh-In*.

Goldie Hawn, Judy Carney and Chelsea Brown go-go dancing in sting bikini's and body paint ... Lily Tomlin sitting smug as a pug in an oversized rocking chair, swinging her legs, and spouting off not-quite-right knowledge as she portrayed precocious 5 and a half year old Edith Ann ... Ruth Buzzi as dumpy Gladys Ormphby hoisting her purse and walloping that dirty old man, Tyrone F. Horneigh - every time he slithered up next to Gladys on the park bench he got thumped ...



Boomers young and old alike salted their everyday conversation with the show's iconic lines: "You bet your sweet bippy!" and "Here come de judge!" and "Just blow in my ear and I'll follow you anywhere." The show moved at a frenetic pace. Political jokes populated sophomoric skits that ridiculed *the system* and the people in it. Double entendre lines oozed from dialogues and monologues bringing previously taboo subjects to prime time for the first time. Guests from the likes of presidential candidate Richard Nixon to *Playboy* magazine founder Hugh Hefner appeared as guests on the show. During the television show's six year run from 1968 to 1973,

Laugh-In embodied the spirit of 1960s “sit-in’s,” “love-in’s,” and “teach-ins.” From conservative right to liberal left, *Rowan and Martin’s Laugh-In* became a cultural touchstone for nearly everyone. The show somehow managed to appeal to both *love bead and flower wearing protestors* and *blue and white collar middle-class Americans*.



When I Michael Larson asked me to review the final version of our new liturgy, *Scandalous Grace*, I found iconic images from the 1960’s populating my imagination. Psychedelic flower-power stickers appeared in my mind as did a body painted Goldie Hawn dancing in her scandalous string bikini. I saw Army helmets and M-16 rifles adorned with daisies. I thought of cultural revolution ... and ... I thought of Jesus.

Sometimes I think those among us ... myself included ... those among us who’ve grown up in the luxurious security of *knowing that no matter what we do God still loves us* ... sometimes I think we forget that not everyone holds this incredible gift in their heart and mind. Sometimes we lose track of how important and rewarding it is to extend in action and proclaim in speech God’s gift of grace to others ... and to ourselves.



It’s easy to forget about this gift of grace and its power to change our lives and change the world. Fear gets in the way a lot. Just look at St. Paul’s reflections about himself before and after experiencing God’s unearned love in Christ. Before Christ Paul zealously and doggedly worked to prove himself worthy of counting himself among God’s people. From what he tells us he obviously worked very hard at being right enough, good enough, pious enough to please God. He even went so far as persecuting others because he believed that God’s acceptance and love are only available to a few who are born to the right family, perform all the right steps and follow all the rules perfectly. How insecure and exhausting his life must have been before

Christ. Imagine how much happiness he missed out on and how many relationships he forsook as he struggled to please a God who was not easily satisfied ... a God whose approval had to be earned. Imagine how much of Paul's life was driven by fear and devoid of joy. ☞ But, after the metaphorical scales were removed from the eyes of Paul's heart a whole new rich and diverse treasure of humanity opened up before him. Deep give-and-take relationships with a wide variety of people would not have been possible for Paul before he knew of God's love in Christ. Only after experiencing God through Christ did that wealth and quality of relationships begin to flow into and out of Paul's life. ☞

You know we can all have that richness if we open ourselves up to it. ☞

That all sounds good to you I hope ... that kind of richness. But, we should probably clarify one thing for ourselves. We should probably make a note to ourselves to not confuse a rich life with a life of ease. We know that Paul's life didn't get easier after his encounter with the Risen Christ. If anything it got harder. ☞ Still, it seems pretty clear in Paul's writings that he wouldn't have traded his more difficult life in Christ from an easier one without Christ.

Paul experienced great freedom in the knowledge that he was a beloved Child of God – no matter how far short of the mark he fell. He was freed from the impossible burden of proving himself worthy before God. At the same time, he was also freed of the burden of having to prove himself to the world by “being enough,” “doing enough,” or “having enough.” No insult, no loss, no set-back in life circumstances could take Paul down ever again because nothing mattered more to him than being secure in his relationship with God through Christ.

When you read through Paul's letters, pretty much all of them, you will discover that Paul knew he was a work in progress ... like most of us are. But, he also knew that he didn't need to work at pleasing God to be loved by God. Instead, he realized that God would work *with* him and he would work *with* God to become the fully perfected person that God created him to be. He and

God would *work together* to reform and transform first Paul and then all those *corners of and people in* the world that he came in contact with.

What about you? Are you a work in progress? I know that I am. Sometimes it's hard for us to see ourselves as entirely beloved of God. And, if we are honest with ourselves, sometimes on a bad day it's hard to see others as perfectly beloved by God. Our eyes get covered by scales of resentment, distrust, suspicion, grasping, greed and all sorts of other things born of fear. Do you think it's safe to say that all of us are far from perfect in that respect? If we stepped back and took an honest look at ourselves we'd see that all of us have less than loveable moments and times in life. We can, we humans, be rather undesirable characters at times.



That brings us back to where we started you know. Think back now, if you will, on all the characters from *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In*. If we met them in real life we would regard them as far less than perfect. Do you agree? Some of them we would surely find offensive and/or terrifying in real life. Dan Rowan was pretty smarmy. Dick Martin was dopey. Joanne Worley was obnoxiously loud. Goldie Hawn was a total ditz. Lilly Tomlin's characters were actually pretty repugnant when it comes right down to it. Tyrone Horneigh was a dirty old man and Ruth Buzzi's character Gladys Ormphby was a frumpy fright who too quickly resorted to physical violence. But America loved them anyway. We loved them anyway. We really really loved them.



I guess that's exactly how God loves each and everyone one of us though. Don't you think?

AMEN