

SPEAKING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE
August 30, 2015 Galatians 5: 16-26
The Church of the Covenant

Who is the real preacher here today? Am I the preacher? Or is the Holy Spirit the real preacher? I have cited before one of my favorite stories of preaching overseas as part of a mission trip where local folks do not necessarily understand English and need a translator. Invariably, one is asked at the very last minute to preach with no time for preparation. The folks will not understand if I demur and say, I am sorry I don't have my notes with me (Preacher, why do you need notes to proclaim the Gospel?) or I am sorry I don't have my Bible with me (Preacher, why don't you know your Bible already?) or I am ill-prepared to respond (Preacher, you should always be prepared to give a response for the hope that is within you –least wise, that's what the Bible says). So you stand up there and preach, whether you have notes, and whether or not you are prepared and whether or not you even have your Bible with you. And they provide the translator.

And it goes something like this –You go on and on and on about some point for several minutes. And then you pause for translation. And the translator goes, “bla-di-bla.” And then you go on and on and on about some point you think is important and pause for translation. And the translator goes simply, “bla-di-bla”. Then your next point is very short and you go, “Bla-di-bla”. And wait for the translation. And the translator goes “Bla-bla-bla-bla-bla” and continues on for the next five minutes. Somehow I suspect over the years that I am not the one who is preaching; I suspect that the translator is the one who is really preaching. The Holy Spirit is like the translator. It is the Holy Spirit who is really preaching into our hearts today. Whatever “bla-bla-bla” I may say, it is how the Spirit takes those words and translates them into all of our hearts that really matters today.

Our scripture from Galatians is the great text: *“If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”* (Galatians 5: 25) And the Apostle Paul, using a Hebrew Parallelism which suggests we know indeed it is the Apostle who has indeed written these words, sets up this wonderful parallel structure for us. He has a listing of *“the desires of the flesh”* which are *“against the Spirit”* including things like *“immorality...idolatry...enmity...anger...party spirit”* As it says, *“these (the Spirit and the flesh) are opposed to each other.”* (Galatians 5: 17) And then the Apostle's beautiful contrast is this. He sets forth the *“fruit of the Spirit”* –*“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...”* (Galatians 5: 23) The fruit of righteousness produced by the seed of faith planted in our heart, produces the harvest of these attributes, beginning with LOVE and ending with SELF CONTROL. The paraphrase of this text might be –PREACH A SERMON –USE WORDS IF NECESSARY. When the Holy Spirit takes the Word of God and preaches the Word of God into our hearts it produces the FRUIT of the SPIRIT. It is the SPIRIT who is the preacher. It is the SPIRIT who is the translator. It is the SPIRIT who speaks into our hearts.

Lots of times I think the church feels it needs to be relevant to its culture. It will let down its standards in order to be more relevant. It will seek to be seeker-friendly in order to draw more people into the church. It will dumb down the Word of God. It will become more and more secular. It will nullify the Gospel by suggesting that there is no need to repent and turn to God. It will suggest it is just a happy feeling in our heart. There is no need for a cross. No need for Jesus to go and die at Calvary. We can just have blessing and happiness through the SPIRIT, no cross necessary. Not for Jesus and not for us. It tries to become more and more like the world and in the process becomes less and less like the LORD whom it claims to follow. We need to stop changing the deck chairs around on the deck of the Titanic, cease trying to become relevant, cease being in thrall to our changeable culture, and seek to be seized

by the presence of the Lord Jesus and seek the Holy Spirit to be at the very center of who we are and what we do and what we say. It is the SPIRIT who is the translator, not us. It is the SPIRIT who will speak the truth into the waiting world's heart. We will not somehow try to go over to the world and lose ourselves in the bargain in order to translate the Gospel into terms which the world understands. And compromise our very souls in the bargain. Be about the Holy Spirit. Let the Holy Spirit preach from our lives. Produce the fruit of the Spirit and watch how God uses that to plant the Word into people's hearts. Watch God speak into people's lives through the WORD and through the SPIRIT...

Before I attended our Haiti Mission Trip this past April, I prayed a lot the week before. Because I knew that officially I was going to be preaching that first Sunday, but I also suspected I would be asked to preach at some other time, and what would my message be? I knew I would be surprised at some point and be expected to preach when I was unprepared to do so. So I kept getting the impression as I prayed of Jesus' words in the Gospel of John, *"No longer do I call you servants...but I have called you friends, for all I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you."* (John 15: 15) Jesus, the Son of God, speaking for His Father in heaven, no longer calls us servants; HE calls us friends. So I prayed about that text and I meditated on it and let it roll over my heart and my mind. So I go to Haiti and preach another text and sermon on Sunday and then I wait. God didn't give me that text not to use. So it was the very end of the week. We are at the New Testament Mission School and it is Friday, Chapel Day, for all of the students. The mission team just happens to be at the school and I ask Pastor Pierre if it is OK if I go over and attend the Chapel service with the children. So I go over and I hear them singing wonderful songs. And I hear them memorize and be able to recite scripture. It is just great. And then Sammy, a young man from the Child Sponsorship Office, who feels called to go into seminary, comes up to me when the Chapel Service is almost over and says, "Pastor Pierre said for you to preach to the children and for me to translate." GULP! But I not prepared and I have no notes and I don't even have my Bible. And then I remember the Word that God placed into my heart the week before and I say OK. "I'll preach." And I preached about how Jesus calls us "FRIEND" and because Jesus is my friend how I am also their friend. And how because Jesus is your friend, how then that makes me your friend also. And how there are hundreds of children back in the United States at my church, who you all have never met, who are your friend, and you are their friend, because Jesus is OUR FRIEND. What a FRIEND we have in Jesus. And Sammy is translating. "Bla-bla-di-bla". He goes on and on when I say hardly anything at all. And when I go on and on and on Sammy says hardly anything at all. And the Holy Spirit was in that Chapel. And it was the Holy Spirit who was translating the Word of God which the Lord had first placed in my heart. And we all then sang *"What a Friend We Have in Jesus"* by the end of the service. And one of the young high school students who I had befriended, Rodney, was playing the drums, and at the end of the service he just raised his one thumb up –Thumbs up for the Lord Jesus.

Maybe we just make it too complicated. *"I have called you friends."* Maybe the Spirit is just saying to the world –Jesus is your friend. And I am your friend, too. And maybe through Jesus you can be a friend of God also...I think that's the way to translate the Gospel into the world today, as it has always been translated, through the Holy Spirit of the One, true and Living God. Dear friends, *"If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."* And Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*