



THURSDAY 08.19.10

Acts 15:1-2, 6-11

One of the most significant controversies of the early church centered around the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. As the apostle Paul spread the gospel throughout the Roman empire, the number of Gentile converts [those not of Jewish origin] continued to expand. Trying to understand which of the practices of Judaism would continue to be binding on these new believers is what led to the Jerusalem Council, a gathering of church leaders which is recorded in Acts 15.

- Peter speaks with boldness about the inclusion of the Gentile converts into this new family of faith. His argument centers around the idea that God has already welcomed them. What does Peter point to as the “sign” of God’s welcome?
- Peter finishes his defense with an essential truth of our faith. We are saved by God’s grace alone. What do you think that means? How might God’s grace lead you in welcoming others?



FRIDAY 08.20.10

Final Reflections

Today marks the end of a 10-week journey through the message series *Why People Leave Church*. Over the past 10 weeks we have looked at what might lead some to drift away from faith. More importantly, we have tried to invest in understanding what the scriptures teach us about what God expects the church to be. We’ve spent time reading the teachings of Jesus and looking at the way he interacted with many different kinds of people. We have also looked at the practices of the early church seeking to discover how the practice of church in the first century might influence our expression of the church in our time today.

As we wrap up this series, take a moment today to consider these questions.

- What do you think God expects of First United Methodist Church Mansfield?
- In what ways is your life being transformed because of your partnership with this family of faith?
- How might God be calling you to take a next step?
- How might God be calling our church to take a next step?
- Why does our community need our church?



GROW • PRAY • STUDY

A RESOURCE FOR DISCIPLES SEEKING TO LOVE GOD, LOVE OTHERS & SERVE THE WORLD ...

Series: *Why People Leave Church*

Sermon: *I Don't Think I'd Be Welcome, I've done Some Bad Stuff!*

Scripture: Psalm 40 and Luke 15

Things I'd like to remember from today's sermon:



Introduction

Jesus was always moving to the fringes because of the people that he found there. He ate with those considered to be lost, put everything else on hold in order to focus on those who had been forgotten and touched those who had been labeled as unclean. Everyone was welcome in Jesus' presence regardless of their age, gender or the "holiness" of their lives.

We believe that God honors the church when we open our hearts and our doors to anyone who desires to connect with God. The church should be a place where we can bring our hurts, share our hopes, our questions and even our regrets. In the presence of God, all are received according to the grace offered in Jesus. As representatives of Christ, we, too, are invited to move towards the fringes to bring hope to the lives that we find there.

As we conclude this important series, may this prayer guide us in our readings this week.

Lord, thank you again for the calling you have placed on our lives to be the church. We pray your blessing over First United Methodist Church Mansfield. Help us, Lord, to fulfill our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ who love God, love others and serve the world. Together we pray, Lord, that you would be honored by the lives that we lead, the work that we do and the faith that we share together. AMEN.



TUESDAY 08.17.10

Mark 10:46-52

Jesus is passing through Jericho. This city is not his final destination. Rather, Jesus is heading to Jerusalem for what we might call his "final showdown" with the religious leaders which will ultimately end in his death. In other words, Jesus would have certainly had this important agenda on his mind as the shouts of Bartimaeus reached his ear.

- In verse 48, it is the crowd that surrounds Jesus that rebukes Bartimaeus and orders him to be quiet. Why would they have wanted to prevent this man from being heard? Have you ever felt like others were trying to silence you? How did that feel?
- Jesus does hear the blind man's cry and after calling for him, he asks the question, "What do you want me to do for you?" If Jesus were to ask you the same question, how might you respond today?



MONDAY 08.16.10

Galatians 3:26-29

Paul lived in a world that was based on division. As a Roman citizen, Paul was someone who had personally benefitted from having the "preferred" status. Certain rights were afforded to him because of this citizenship, but in Galatians, Paul is talking about a different kind of citizenship which has been opened up to everyone.

- The language of "sons" in verse 26 is Paul's way of referencing the fact that we have received an "inheritance" from God. How would you describe the "benefits" of being an "heir" of God's promises to his children?
- The historian Thomas Cahill writes that in this section of Galatians, Paul is articulating a brand new thought about "the equality of all humans before God." In other words, God does not play favorites. Can you think of someone who desperately needs to hear that message? How might God lead you to pray for them today?



WEDNESDAY 08.18.10

Luke 5:27-32

There are many moments that we find throughout the life of Jesus that we would describe as amazing. The response of men like Levi, also known as Matthew, to Jesus' invitation to follow him would certainly fit into that category. Again and again they leave everything they know behind in order to follow Jesus.

- If we follow Jesus' logic in verse 31, we might think of Levi as one of the "sick" who needed a doctor. What does this say about Jesus that he would include someone like Levi in his small group of disciples? How does this speak to how the church might include those today who are in need of healing?
- If you have already responded to the invitation Jesus offers to follow him, what have you had to leave behind? Is there anything else in your life that God might be calling you to leave behind?
