
The "Ding Dongs" of Life

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The Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

Galatians 5:1,13-25

Gospel Luke 9:51-62

Back in the 20th century, I held several positions with Delta Airlines. One of these positions was that of a flight attendant. On one of my flights, I don't recall where we were going nor when, I was given a card by a passenger. On the back of the card these words were written:

"But I say Live, abide habitually by the holy spirit""responsive and controlled and guided by God, then you will not gratify the cravings of human nature without God""for the desires of the flesh and the urgings of the Holy spirit co-exist within us and we are never free from their pressures, therefore release all things to Him, moment by moment""even the ding dongs of life."

The ding dongs were not referring to the wicked witch of the west. The ding dongs of life were referring to the adjectives that are in our lesson today from Galatians. Those words describe how one can live when living only in the flesh.

I don't recall where we were or where we were going, but I remember conversations I had on flights, for one reason or another. The passenger, Pat Johnson, was the National Program Administrator for "Love Incorporated--A Ministry of World Vision".

She was reading scripture as I recall, which was a daring thing to do out in the open from my perspective at that time. She was in public where others could see her. Her bible was open on her tray table. She was reading this passage from Galatians.

Ms. Johnson used the words "ding dongs" to describe the cravings of life that cause us to ignore God. The "ding dongs" of life tempt us to squeeze God into our plans and tell God what we would like to have done for us.

On that day, Pat Johnson talked about a freedom that comes with no longer having to follow the law letter for letter, but desiring the fruit of the spirit.

There is a freedom that comes when one lives according to the spirit and not the flesh, according to Pat Johnson and according to Paul as he warned the people of Galatia. But Paul says that the freedom that comes with living according to the fruit of the spirit is lead by the spirit. The freedom that we as Christians have if we take the words of Paul seriously, suggest that the way of living that is chosen to reflect the fruit of the spirit can only be obtained through the acts and motions of love.

With freedom as we know comes responsibility. According to Paul, we are not free to live our lives excessively. We are not set at liberty to pursue selfish ends. Our independence does not make us infidels. In his words, "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature." (from *Paul for Everyone* by Tom Wright). When we indulge ourselves with those trappings that bring about the gratifications of the flesh, the ding dongs, we are not

taking advantage of the many opportunities to love as Christ suggest that we love.

When we love as Christ loves then the freedom to embrace the fruit of the spirit surrounds us.

The Galatians received the Spirit on the basis of their faith, not the law. Paul spent a considerable part of this letter arguing that all those who believe in Jesus Christ are free, free from their pagan past. And free from the law. This freedom however is for love. The freedom is given to us for a purpose. The purpose is not for self indulgence, but for a higher purpose. To love God as God loves us. Thus, we can love others. The image of a vertical relationship with God as we pray, enables our horizontal relationships with others to grow in love and flourish.

When we love just those who love us, then we are loving in a manner that is comfortable for us and convenient for us. It is only when we come out of our comfort zone that we truly begin to understand what Paul was saying to the people of Galatia. And in order to love as we're called to love, it has to be through the spirit. Otherwise it is almost impossible to love as Christ loves us. We literally cannot do it on our own. And we can't do it without the help of the spirit because of the desires of the flesh. Those emotions that are outlined in Galatians today.

When we are free to love in spite of our temptations, to not love through whatever our differences may be, we somehow lose our way, according to those who have gone before us.

When Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem he appears to be determined to tell others that the road of loyalty to God involves multiple bumps of rejection. And none of us like to be rejected.

However, when we love it brings about a strenuous manner of living at times. Living with love and through love brings about rigorous and consuming demands as well. However, the demands of loving one another fills us and takes us to a place that says, "I will live free and not be encumbered by those nuances of life and living that keep me in bondage," whatever that bondage may be.

When we are not in bondage, we are certainly free to love. The fruit of the spirit prevails and we are living with our faces set toward Jerusalem. Set toward Jerusalem with a purpose that is lasting and life giving.

I was in the company of a family last evening and one of the family members said at dinner, "I love my job, I absolutely love what I am doing. I should have been doing this a long time ago." You see, she works with children who have mental challenges. She says they are open, free and one can feel the love from them. They are not encumbered and are free to be. This is a mutual relationship. There is a purpose in their love for one another.

They feel love and they give love. Not with expectation, but with peace and harmony.

Well, I think I will keep my card from Pat Johnson. I don't keep it in any particular place. It just seems to turn up, somehow, especially when I need to be reminded of the "ding dongs". I don't have the courage to throw it away. Not just yet. Maybe one day.

Maybe, when I have reached perfection and am no longer tempted to gratify the cravings of the flesh.

I am reminded that the "The fruit of the spirit is" love, joy, peace, great- heartedness, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

There is no law that opposes things like that! And those who belong to the Messiah, Jesus, crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the spirit, let's line up with the spirit. And be truly free. Free through the love of God and for one another.

Amen.