

We had a lively discussion about the Fall Fair yesterday. Ten people gathered to talk about the place of the Fall Fair in the fulfillment of our mission. We told our favourite fall fair stories; we talked about the bad experiences we'd soon forget. We held up our three core values – Relevant Spirituality, Active Hospitality, Vital Community Relationships – and we wondered how the fall fair helps us to live out our values. We talked about the Fall Fair's purpose and what goals we hoped to achieve. It was a great discussion. The Fall Fair is on. The date is October 22. And what we've decided is that everything we do at the fall fair, will be a promotion and communication strategy for our new mission strategy as we have discerned it over the past 18 months.

But there was one note of caution. A suggestion came up and it really rang true for us. Instead of giving to people brochures and flyers and postcards and more information about us than they would ever care to read, why don't we make every exchange, every conversation, ever experience a reflection of our mission as we have discerned. Let's give the people who come to our fall fair an experience of what it will be like to fully participate in this faith community.

Rather than give them a head case, let's give them an experience.

The apostle Paul had an incredible mind. Throughout his letters, we can see him wrestling continually with the letter of the law, and its theology, while he helps his readers deal with the experiences of being human, and being in relationship with each other as they figure out what it means to be people of the way – followers of Jesus. As a Pharisee, he knew intimately the Jewish law, the requirements of the law and the consequence of the law. As a Pharisee, he lived in his head most of the time. Legal minds are important. We emotional types need the legal minds to help us get beyond the emotionality of situations and to think through, rationally, appropriate responses.

But we can't read Paul without remembering his conversion experience, without understanding that it was an experience that brought him to his knees and to his profound sense of the grace of God through an experience of the risen Christ. I've said this many times. As fine a legal mind as he had, his conversion was based on a life changing experience.

Hell bent to persecute followers of Jesus, having presiding over the death of the first Christian martyr, Paul was on his way to the city of Damascus, when a light from heaven flashed around him. He heard of voice saying "Saul of Tarsus, (that was his name then) why are you persecuting me." And of course he got scared...he dropped to

the ground...and the voice of the risen one said, arise, go to Damascus and you will be told what to do. When he stood, even though his eyes were open, he could not see. Biblical code friends....think of those times when your eyes were open and you could not see. It was a crisis of faith if there ever was one. He arose from the ground found the old man Ananias, who interpreted for him what had happened. Something like scales fell from his eyes, and from that moment on, Paul realized that even he could not live up to the measure of the law. "Thou shalt not kill." It was a devastating blow to his ego and to his understanding of the law of Moses and it compelled his theology of justification by grace not works.

Even though he had a fine legal mind, Paul's life was forever changed by a transforming experience of his eyes being opened to the grace of God in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Let's give the people who come to the fall fair an experience of our mission, let's not give them only words that they will likely not read.

This morning, Ray continued to read from the letter to the church in Rome picking up where we left off last week. In this segment, Paul returns to his beginning as a Pharisee exploring a legal argument about why the gospel of Jesus Christ transcends the law. That's actually ironic isn't. Paul uses a legal framework to argue the redundancy of the law. It's like a lawyer today arguing before a supreme court judge that we don't need a supreme court.

More particularly, Paul wonders about a life in the Spirit and a life in the flesh. Before I go, I want to clear up anyone's theology of the flesh as we hear it this morning. In Paul's world, mid-first-century Palestine, writing about the flesh, he is not referring to the body alone. Paul is speaking about the state of our being as a result of our being separated from the wisdom of God. In Paul's world that is what sin is, separation. Paul is saying that the consequence of living out of relationship with God is separation and the consequences of separation. When we live in the Spirit the consequence is a life of peace.

The law will not do, says Paul. It is a creation of the human mind and as people living in the flesh; we need a source of grace beyond ourselves. And speaking from his own experience and not his trust in the law, Paul reminds his readers that the source of this grace will be found in the life, death and resurrection of Christ and in our living into the meaning that these words have for us. And this grace will set us free.

It sounds perfect, except that I wish I was certain how it lives out in the 21st century. What do we understand as grace, from the perspective of Spirit...how do we know this experientially? How is it possible to have an existential, transcendent experience of grace outside a relationship – with creation, with one another, with ourselves? How can we know grace, if it's not lived out in our lives? And how can we know grace if it's not connected to, and experienced in a particular context, a particular relationship, a particular time?

And this morning, what about this moment? At a fundraising event for Vernon's hospice house, Sheila spoke to the crowd. She said "if you found out today, that you had 24 hours to live, is there anything in your experience left unsaid or undone?" There was a silent pause as each thought about a particular context, a particular relationship, a particular time. She finished by saying "let this question guide how you live every day."

Friends, this morning, I would ask you the question. If you found out today that you had 24 hours to live, is there anything in your experience left unsaid or undone? What would drive you to speak what needed to be spoken, and to do what needed to be done in a particular context, a particular relationship, a particular time?

Basing his legal argument on the supremacy of life in the Spirit, Paul asserts that grace is any experience that resembles the grace and compassion of Christ. In the example of finding out we had 24 hours to live, being set free in a life of Spirit must mean that those things left unsaid or undone, don't stay unsaid or undone. And friends as much as we are in Christ, Paul says its Christ within us who calls do the work of healing – broken relationships, broken promises, broken hearts, broken expectations.

Can you imagine....set free from those things that create separation in us? Empowered by Spirit, Paul says it's what it means to set our minds on the Spirit. We can do this; thanks be to God. Amen.