

Sermon 1-26-20  
Paul Purdue preaching

*Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves? Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you? Will you use your freedom and power to resist evil, injustice, and oppression?*

Accepting and resisting are seeming opposites, but they can flow from the same core convictions. A mother bear loves, accepts and nurtures her cubs and so she resists those who might harm her babies. Accepting and resisting can flow from the same love. If we accept God's Love for all people, Love compels us to resist doing harm to anyone. If we accept justice as our inner guide we resist injustice everywhere. If we believe in our freedom, we resist oppression anywhere. When our souls accept Christ's core teaching to *"love our neighbor as ourselves"*, that love births our resistance to evil, injustice and oppression on behalf of our neighbors.

When Doctor Martin Luther King was a child of maybe six or seven, he went shoe shopping with his Father downtown. Doctor King's dad was the son of a sharecropper, and knew the brutalities of southern segregation first hand. King introduces us to his dad saying *"With his fearless honesty and his robust, dynamic presence, his (father's) words commanded attention."*

Martin and his dad looked at some shoes and then sat down in the first available seats near the front of the shoe store. The young white clerk came up and murmured politely *'I'll be happy to wait on you if you'll just move to those seats in the rear'* *The Senior King said: "There is nothing wrong with these seats. We are quite comfortable here."* *"Sorry", said the clerk, "but you will have to move"* *"We'll either buy shoes sitting here,"* Martin's Father said, *"or we won't buy shoes at all."* Whereupon he took little Martin's hand and they left the store. Years later Martin recalled how angry his father was that day, how as they walked down the street his dad was muttering, *"I don't care how long I have to live with this system, I will never accept it"*

Love can get angry. Love might storm out of a shoe store muttering defiance. Love resists those who put down someone's sacred worth. Jesus grew angry at our hardness of hearts, our preference for rules to justice. Jesus was *"Looking around at (the church folks) with anger, deeply grieved at their unyielding hearts"* (Mark 3) Reflecting on his dad's resistance, Doctor King wrote *"As a teenager I had never been able to accept the fact of having to go to the back of the bus... the very idea of separation did something to my sense of dignity and self-respect."* ("Stride Towards Freedom: The Montgomery Story" Harper and Row 1958 MLK) Rev. Martin Luther King Senior taught young Martin to accept God's acceptance, and to resist the forces contrary to Love.

Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you? What do you do with your freedom, your power, and your privilege? What does God's Love keep you from accepting in our nation, city, denomination, or around our dinner tables?

If we love our children, or if you, children or teenagers, love your parents, then you will resist certain behaviors. *God does not want us to use our freedom and power for self indulgence.* (Galatians 5:13) *Instead, Love resists being impatient, unkind, jealous,*

*braggadocious, arrogante, rude, manipulative, irritable, whiny, unjust or dishonest. (1 Corinthians 13) God's love is a way of living or a way of being alive. If I love you, then I resist objectification, hedonism, fighting, obsessing, losing my temper, hyper competitiveness, selfishness, tribalism, jealousy, self-medication, and stuff like that! (Galatians 5)*

Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you? As a mystic, the Apostle Paul loves the words Freedom and Power. Our passage paints a mystical picture of God's love shining through our blemishes and dents. Paul speaks of "the face of Jesus" it is the core of Paul's faith. Such Faith, Freedom, Power and Love defies formulas. Accepting such Love frees, empowers, and transforms us.

*Paul begins in chapter 3: The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life... The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Lord's Spirit is, there is freedom.... God's light shines out at midnight, driving back the night. God gives us the light of knowledge in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this incredible treasure in clay pots. We hold this awesome power in earthen vessels. So even as we experience all kinds of trouble: we aren't crushed. We are confused, but we aren't depressed. We are harassed, but we aren't abandoned. We are knocked down, but we aren't knocked out. Even as our bodies are breaking down on the outside, the person that we are on the inside is being renewed every day. Our temporary problems are producing an eternal stockpile of glory. So we don't focus on the things that can be seen but on the things that can't be seen. The things that can be seen don't last, but the things that can't be seen are eternal.*

In a world is constantly measuring us and marketing to us- it can be hard for us to believe that we are God's treasures. In a world of oppression and objectification, we may not believe our bodies are like clay cracked jars holding this beautiful Light- seen in the face of Jesus. In a world that demands proof, we might struggle to believe God could do something extraordinary through us! Yet Jesus whispers, "*I assure you that whoever believes in me will do the works that I did.*" *You can do even greater works because Christ goes to be with God.*" (John 14:12) If we will stop and ponder, taking the time to worship, centering our activity in God, accepting God's Love as the rule of our life, teaching our children about the unseen things that endure forever they might come to know their sacred worth. They might see the face of Jesus: or experience faith, know soul-resting hope, and live a life of love.

Let us accept the deepest Love in the universe as our rule. And maybe we will see the face of Jesus transforming us and freeing us to be the person God made us to be. And knowing we are loved we will naturally resisting the false identities the world tries to give us. God's Love empowers, frees, and resists.

This week, I heard the story of a clery woman who grew up completely outside of the church. She never attended church until she was in high school. Rose was raised by her mother and her mother was a drug addict, and so her home was filled with the kind of chaos drugs produce. A friend, invited Rose to her very conservative non-denominational youth group. As Rose shared her spiritual journey, she spoke of how even today as a future UMC minister, she is deeply thankful for that evangelical church, because they introduced her to Jesus. And Jesus' Love taught her to Love herself. Jesus and these church folks helped her accept her sacred worth, for God so loved the world and God loved Rose. In that evangelical church she saw what Paul calls "the light

of knowledge in the face of Jesus” or as Wesley said “her heart was strangely warmed”. As Rose told her story, she paused and held up her coffee cup, saying, *“but it was like they put Jesus was inside a little cup. The cup holding Jesus had all these rules. The cup declared that women could only serve in the kitchen or the nursery.”* But hear the Good News: Love resists oppression- Love just knows, feels, twitches, squirms, or rebels: sensing something is wrong with the portrait “they” have painted. They quoted Bible verses, but somehow Rose knew that Jesus was bigger than the cup they had put Christ in. One day Rose visited a Methodist Church with another friend, and seeing a woman leading the congregation as pastor, she knew instantly in her spirit she was home!

Oh let us accept that we are loved by Jesus for Love changes everything. ChristLove empowers, accepts, frees, and resists harm, oppression and injustice. Amen