

Galatians 1:11-24

¹¹For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin;¹²for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

¹³You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. ¹⁴I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. ¹⁵But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased ¹⁶to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, ¹⁷nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.

¹⁸Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days; ¹⁹but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother. ²⁰In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie! ²¹Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, ²²and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; ²³they only heard it said, "The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy." ²⁴And they glorified God because of me.

The Word of God for the People of God.

Thanks be to God.

This, this story in our passage from Luke just a moment ago, this is just the sort of thing that Jesus did. Approaching a woman, a widow, and now a widow without a son to care for her in old age, coming upon this funeral procession and getting right up in the middle of things. Right up in her business, laying his hands right on the stretcher, the hearse. To come upon a scene where he has not been invited, where no one has called for his help--to show up and cause...a disturbance. A...kerfuffle, if you will.

Kerfuffle is a favorite word of mine. It's a British word with roots in Scotland, where as early as the 16th century, Scotsmen used the verb "to fuffle," meaning to dishevel or disrupt something or someone. And so, when you "fuffle" someone or something, you might say that you have brought about...a kerfuffle.

This is what Jesus did--he roamed the countryside, causing a kerfuffle in people's lives, in entire families and villages, it was his bread and butter, or his bread and wine, you might say. All day long he was 'fuffling,' meddling in people's business, showing up in their homes and bringing the dead to life, redeeming and restoring the broken and forgotten ones, stirring the pot, calling people to come on out from their boats and fish for people. It's what Jesus did, bringing a kerfuffle everywhere he went.

But then Jesus died, and people like Saul of Tarsus thought that finally this signaled the coming end of the kerfuffle. Saul of Tarsus, that scholar of the law, taught by the best of the best to defend what is good and righteous, and orderly according to the law. Saul expected that this kerfuffle about Jesus had ended, and

all that was left was to stamp out the last few followers. And so, like a farmer dancing around a smoldering field, stomping out the last plumes of a grass fire, Saul went from place to place putting these followers of Jesus, these kerfufflers, quite literally, to rest.

Little did Saul and so many others know that Jesus was far from finished with fuffling. They did not know, they could not have known that Jesus' death would not be the end, but just the beginning. Little did Saul know that Jesus was about to come along that road to Damascus and bring the kerfuffle right to him. You know the story, Paul is riding along when suddenly he's struck with a light that literally blinds him, and he hears the voice of Jesus telling him to stop the persecution, and his friends take him somewhere to stay and for three days he doesn't eat or drink, he just prays. And meanwhile, Jesus appears to Ananias, calling him to come and lay his hands on Saul and heal his eyes, and Ananias doesn't want to do it, but you know, when Jesus appears to you and starts causing a kerfuffle in your life, it's pretty hard to say no, and so Ananias comes, and he lays hands on Saul, and everything is changed. Scales fall from Saul's eyes, he repents, and he is baptized, and then, having been duly messed with, sufficiently disrupted and disturbed by Jesus, Saul goes on to become Paul, perhaps God's chief kerfuffler.

In the passage we just read from Paul's letter to the Galatians, Paul narrates this change, this total disruption, this reorienting moment in his life. He lays the groundwork, beginning in verse 13; he says "You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was

trying to destroy it, I was advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors," and then he comes to the point where everything changed, the pivot point, the hinge on which his whole life turned--he says, "But when God...was pleased to reveal his Son to me..."

He doesn't say, "and then the craziest thing happened to me!" He doesn't say, "then this light appeared." He doesn't say, "Ananias came along and changed everything," no, Paul hangs the turn in his life on three little words: "But. When. God." Three little words. Friends, I want to suggest to you that the greatest moments in our lives, the best turns in our story, begin with the phrase, 'But when God...' "But when God got ahold of me..." "But when God got ahold of us." "But when God started meddling in my life..." "But when God finally got my attention..."

Because the truth is, this is what God does: God gets ahold of what is ordinary and makes it holy. God gets ahold of a person like Moses who is weak and isolated and wanted by the law, and God makes him the leader of his people. God gets ahold of a band of slaves and makes them a holy nation. God gets ahold of a child and makes him a prophet. God gets ahold of a poor young girl and makes her a God-bearer. God gets ahold of a disgraced woman and makes her an evangelist. God gets ahold of a boy's lunch and makes a meal for thousands. God gets ahold of a cross, an instrument for death, and makes it the wellspring of life. And it didn't stop then! It continues to now, it continues to us! Even now, as we gather this morning, God gets ahold of groceries and makes grace. God gets ahold

of ordinary people, and makes a church; a community where family takes on new meaning; a gathering where God's spirit is visible, evident, radiant; a place where all people truly can be welcomed to bring all that they are.

Westbury, you have taught me so much in three years. You have shown me how to risk loving whoever God brings your way. You have taught me that forgiveness and failure are means of grace. You have allowed me to enter your lives in both mundane and holy moments to learn afresh what it means to be human and to be afraid and to follow Jesus anyway.

But of all that you've taught me, the most important thing is this: that when God gets ahold of us, what God will do is beyond what any of us can imagine. What God will make of us, what God will bring to us, how God will use us, where God will take us, it is a ride none of us can plan, none of us can strategize, none of us can control, because it is God's ride; God's rollercoaster of grace that takes us like Paul through pain, to hope, through confusion to understanding, through fear to peace, through sorrow and onward to joy. It's a ride where beginnings and endings overlap all the time, and where hidden turns surprise us.

But when God has ahold of us, it's a ride that brings us finally to the feast. Finally to the table where grace is abundant and spilling over; where enemies are reconciled and weapons are laid down; where sin is healed and the world is made whole again. Friends, as my time with you comes to a close, I will forever remember sharing in the joy of this feast with you, sharing together God's grace, God's pardon, God's peace. And I look forward to the day when we will share it

together again in the fullness of God's kingdom, when heaven and earth are one. And until then, I pray that God would continue to get ahold of you, that Jesus would continue to bring his kerfuffling ways into your lives, and I pray that you might find your greatest fulfillment, your greatest adventures in following Him.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.