

---

## *Try Love: It Will Make You Vulnerable*

**A sermon by CanonCarolynne Williams**  
**Proper 8 – Year C**

Did you grow up going to church? Or perhaps your folk were not church-going people. It doesn't really matter how we came into the church. The point is we are here, in church, and are an integral part of a community that prays together and seeks on a continuous basis making a difference in our lives, as well as the lives of others. How do we accomplish that? By growing in our faith.

Our friends are here in church, maybe not all of our friends, but at least one or two. We spend time with them as we extend ourselves to others and we receive from others as we move through life. We receive the sacrament and are lifted as we bring our concerns to the altar and leave them there. We return to our seats of worship with a renewed mind and spirit.

Back in the day, going to church was great, too, because this is where you saw your friends, your teachers, your principal, and your sports team favorites.

I don't recall a lot of the sermons, however, for two reasons.

My growing up encircled me in a special environment a different circumstance. This circumstance had its advantages when it came to growing in faith from my vantage point for two reasons.

1. I heard a lot of the sermon before it was preached on Sunday. My dad was the senior minister. Our home was quite comfortable, but it was not a huge house. If E. James was working on his sermon and I wanted to play the piano, I would close the door to his study; with permission.
2. If I was already playing the piano in the living room and he went into his study which was off of the living room, he would close the door.

So, church was not a BIG priority for me. I liked going to church because that's where my friends were. But, I was more interested in MY social and my friends social life. All of this was back in the previous millennia and certainly before the digital age.

My growing in faith was more tied to reading my horoscope, faithfully. After we had breakfast, every morning, I would get the AJC to read about my future for that day. I was set. I was growing in my faith, looking forward to the next day, always seeking with eagerness and curiosity the next day. And yes, we prayed together. Always at home, at breakfast, and at church, corporately.

We were growing into our different stages of faith.

James Fowler, Emory University Professor Emeritus, who died several years ago, established a great model of *Stages of Faith*. Fowler's work cites six stages of faith that one will experience regardless of one's church background, denomination, religious background or not, including non-believers and even those who don't believe in any entity, but themselves.

There is a movement that one experiences in terms of spiritual growth which has the potential of engaging us and carrying

us to another level. Also, according to Fowler, one can remain in the same place for the remainder of one's life if there is no inward awareness or reflection on one's part.

So the work of moving toward being free in the love of Christ and no longer being in bondage to whatever we are in bondage to is a work in progress.

“Faith can be expressed and experienced in many ways.” Whatever your journey and my journey have been and have yet to come, calls for a clearer understanding and declaration of the depth of our commitment to God. When we commit our work to God's work and move toward to that end, it is not always going to take us where we think we are moving toward.

If we are realistic with ourselves and seeking a stronger relationship with God, we will find a yearning within which removes the desire to please the flesh. Does the desire to please the flesh disappear? As we build our relationship with God, those desires of the flesh diminish, and bondage is broken.

I no longer read my horoscope for guidance.

Our commitment to God's will in our lives will call for sacrifice in our lives on our behalf, our commitment to God's will in our lives will not always be convenient nor will it wipe away our tears.

Paul says to the people of Galatia, “For what the flesh desires is opposed to the spirit, and what the spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. ‘But, if you are led by the spirit, you are not subject to the law.’ For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”

There are some of us who are not clear about the word and connotation of slavery. In this context Paul in preaching to the people of Galatia and to those who hear of today, freedom comes from the life of Christ being given for those who want to grow in grace and love. Paul tells the people of Galatia to be led by the spirit and not the flesh. He implies that if we follow the desires of the flesh, we will put on the yoke of slavery again. Over and over again. Not so much in a physical sense, but in a mental sense, a psychological sense, the worst kind.

If one's mind is not free in Christ and is consciously bound by history, licentiousness and the law (Old Testament law), one is not free to follow one of the two greatest commandments: “to love they neighbor as thyself.”

There is no law against such things.

How do you know if you are carrying a yoke of slavery? What are we slaves to? What would you and I rather do than seek the face of God in others. Seeking the love of Christ in one another. What would you and I rather do than be of service to others?

Life 'in Christ' means the decentering of the self in a reordering of identity in which our relationship with God is primary. No longer are we at the center of our own universes. Instead, we live with and for us.

Paul asserted that faithfulness begins when a believer dies to every other controlling power, but lives for God in Christ Jesus. Justification for purposeful living comes only through faith. Not luck, not horoscopes, not coincidences, but plain old fashioned faith.

It will bring new life in Christ every time. Loving one another as Christ has loved us. No bondage, no competition, no selfishness, but love.

Amen.

1 Dwight J. Zscheile, "A Missional Theology of Spiritual Formation. Cultivating Sent Communities: Missional Spiritual Formation (Grand Rapids, Michigan) 2012, 19.

---

© *The Cathedral of St. Philip. All rights reserved.*