

Today we continue reading from Paul's letter to the churches in the region called Galatia, a letter which we call Galatians. The area of Galatia is found in the modern day country of Turkey. If you follow international news you know that Turkey has been in the news a lot over the past several weeks with anti-government protests.

Modern day Turkey is a country that has maintained itself as a secular state without an established national religion. The new Turkish government is being accused of trying to create a country with a national religion and residents of the country are protesting what they see as an attempt to break down a separation of church and state. This region that becomes modern day Turkey is where Paul is writing to.

Paul is writing to a Gentile or non-Jewish audience. He is writing to them to address questions they have about whether or not they need to abide by Jewish laws if they are Christian. In today's reading we will pick up some conflict between Paul and Peter, two of the great early church leaders.

Today we are going to be reading from the second chapter of Galatians. Let us now listen to what Paul says to his audience and try to glean something of importance for us today.

**Read Galatians 2**

Basically Paul tells his audience that faith in Christ is more important than following rules and regulations. Faith is stronger than law. Faith in Christ is more important than following a set of rules. Following Christ is not about making sure you do all the right things. Following Christ is about having faith and trusting in the grace and love that Christ offers to all of us.

Following Christ is about trusting Christ to straighten up our messy lives. According to Paul, following Christ is not about working harder and harder to earn God's love and acceptance. Following Christ is not about having the right theology about God, it is not about having the right politics.

Following Christ is not about being in a pure denomination. Following Christ is not about being a part of the right church. Following Christ is not about being good enough. All of those items are secondary items. Following Christ is about faith and trust in God.

What does that look like? I want to invite you into a story. A story told by Rabbi Edwin Friedman.

## Round in Circles

Late one afternoon a moth emerged from its cocoon and chanced upon a fly buzzing about a window. With no particular purpose of its own, the moth was fascinated by the industry and vigorous intent of the other insect. Over and over, the fly would land on the pane, stay motionless for an indefinite time, and then suddenly, without any signal, retreat into the air, only to land inches away, after a short flight to nowhere in particular.

“What are you doing?” the moth asked.

“What do you mean, what am I doing?” answered the fly. “Can’t you tell?”

“Well, I’m sorry” the moth replied. “It’s just that you seemed to be going about your business with such energy, and I was wondering ...”

The fly landed a few centimeters away. “I’ve been at this all day,” he said, “and you want to know what I’m doing? Hmmf!” And he took off again, flew for a few seconds, and returned, this time landing on the moth’s other side.

“Look here,” said the moth, rotating his whole body so he could see the fly better. “I just thought that maybe I could ...”

But the fly had taken to the air again, as if never to return. He changed direction abruptly, however - in fact, it was so quick, it might have appeared to be one continuous flight - and descended further down the glass.

The moth glided over, landing gently nearby, but before he could continue his thought, the fly was once again in flight. Up he went, over and down, nearly a vertical descent this time, landing sharply to the left. Then, almost immediately, off, with a steep climb, but with a roundtrip that left him exactly where he had been.

“I really don’t mean to be impolite,” said the moth, “but I notice how you keep taking off and landing. Yet you don’t seem to be getting anywhere.”

“Well it won’t help any talking to you,” said the fly. “Time’s a wasting,” he added, and elevated himself quickly, this time coming down at the top of the window. Motionless, but ever intense, he called over to the moth. “Don’t you realize that today is almost over?” - and then, without waiting for an answer, he flit. Though just as if he had been held to some limit by an elastic band, he rebounded upon

the pane, circled to another spot, came back to the first, and finally stayed still, looking impassively on the softly swaying moth.

“Don’t you ever get tired?” asked the moth.

“I can’t allow myself to,” said the fly as he bolted into the air, only to dart back to his previous position.

“What are you looking for?” asked the moth.

“Looking for?” the fly responded incredulously, then hurled himself out from the glass.

“You sure don’t have much patience!” said the moth.

“That’s easy for you to say,” the fly called back; then hopping over, he added, “I only have today.”

“The window’s closed,” said the moth.

“I know that!” replied the fly in a “don’t be stupid” sort of way and zoomed off, circled, slowed almost to a hover, and quickly alighted nearby.

“I don’t see any cracks or holes either,” said the moth.

“Tell me something new,” the fly said sarcastically and took off.

When he had returned, the moth responded, “I mean there just doesn’t seem to be any way at all to get to the other side.”

“Look,” said the fly, “I don’t tell you how to run your life.” And plummeting backwards from the window, he circled and touched down. “At least I try,” he added after he had landed.

“God, you’re serious.”

“That’s easy for you to say,” the fly replied again, positioning himself for another take-off. “It’s not your problem.”

“But have you had any success?” asked the moth.

“Not yet; why do you think I have to keep trying?”

“How long will you continue?” asked the moth.

“Till I succeed.”

“What if you don’t?”

“I can’t allow myself to think about that either.”

“Suppose you cover every inch and still don’t succeed?”

“I’ve already done that.”

“You have? Then why don’t you go to another window?”

“I can’t do that. I have to keep trying.”

“But you just said you’ve covered every inch.”

“I might have missed something.”

“At least,” said the moth, “you might try another approach.

“I’ve considered that. I have decided to try harder.” And as soon as he had announced his commitment, the fly rocketed away and began taking off and landing so frequently that he appeared to be bouncing off the surface.

“All those eyes sure don’t help you to see much better, do they?” asked the moth.

“What do you mean by that?” returned the fly. He had come to a stop on the lower portion of the window.

“Well, I’ve been watching you, and maybe it’s not how much one can see, but the angle.”

“I’ve thought of that; why do you think I keep coming from a different direction?”

“I don’t think you understand,” said the moth. “I meant the attitude.”

“I try as hard as I can,” the fly protested.

“I meant perspective,” said the moth with some exasperation. “You know - distance.”

“I go a thousand times my height as it is. If I were to go any further, there would be less time left for landings.” The fly flew off again.

“Distance has to do with thinking!” shouted the moth, still trying to make the other understand.

“What’s that?” asked the fly, intent on the glass window before him.

But the moth never heard the question. By now it had become dusk, and from somewhere far off, a light source began to radiate. The spark attracted its attention. Then suddenly, as if by some secret command, the moth fluttered and took wing in the direction of the glow, where it crackled itself to a crisp on an electric arc.

Faith in Christ is not about doing the right things harder and harder until you think you have satisfied God and appeased God. Faith in Christ is not about working harder and harder at something with the belief that if we just work hard enough we will earn what we are looking for in life.

Faith in Christ is freedom from that. We don't have to try to earn God's acceptance. We don't have to work harder and harder to try to get what God gives us freely.

We don't have to worry about following all of the right rules to earn our salvation from God.

Salvation is freely given through Christ.

God's grace is there in our midst if we just look for it from the right angle.

We don't work harder for it. We simply accept what God has already given us.

Following Christ is about accepting God's grace and trusting God to provide what we need. AMEN.

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-Friedman, Edwin, *Friedman's Fables*, Guilford Press, NY, 1990

-Given: June 16, 2013 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)