

Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki's Sermon

6/20/10 **Clothed with Christ Galatians 3: 26-29**

After the resurrection of Jesus, the number of Christians began to increase. Congregations were established in many areas outside Jerusalem. Without these first generation churches, there would have been no Christian faith today.

But these churches were not perfect. In fact, they were often weak in conviction, shallow in faith, and indecisive in affirmation.

A good example is the churches in Galatia. In the beginning, Jews and gentiles ate together, worshiped together, and studied together as faithful followers of Christ.

But in a few years, strange opinions arose and became quite influential. They insisted that gentiles must appropriate and practice the Jewish religious laws and social customs to become Christian.

Not only that. They also insisted that slave and free should not worship together in the same sanctuary. They were also adamant that church leaders must be male, and male only.

Many Christians were intimidated by these opinions and became hesitant to proclaim the equal worth of personhood under Christ.

Paul heard about this sorry situation of Galatia. The news shook him to the core. So he wrote an open letter to all the Churches in Galatia.

We can surmise his indignation and deep disappointment from the following words. "O foolish Galatians," he wrote, "I wish I could talk to you one on one. Because of you, I am at my wit's end."

Then Paul went on to reiterate the crux of Christian faith as follows. "You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. You have clothed yourself with Christ."

In other words, Paul is saying, "In the place of social, religious, and sexual prejudices, you clothed yourself with Christ. What happened to your faith? What happened to your joy? What happened to your passion for Christ?"

He then wrote the following well-known sentences. "There is no longer Jew or Greek. There is no longer slave or free. There is no longer male or female. You are all one in Christ Jesus, our Lord."

2000 years later, we are to pay close attention to Paul's proclamation. For unless we are careful, we may fall into the same pitfall in which those Christians in Galatia fell.

Today there are churches that do not recognize women as ministers. Today there are churches that refuse to invite people with AIDS into their sanctuaries. Today there are churches that refuse to welcome homosexuals as their Christian brothers and sisters.

We do not live by the worldly values of our society. We are clothed with Christ. We do not live by traditions and old rules. We are clothed with Christ. We do not live by social, religious, and sexual prejudices. We are clothed with Christ.

Some of you have heard about Rev. Toyohiko Kagawa. When he was a young pastor, he lived in the poverty stricken area of the city of Kobe, Japan. On one cold evening, Kagawa saw a young girl crying in front of his dilapidated parsonage. Lovingly he invited her in and gave her some warm tea. His wife took her coat off and put it on the girl. "Go ahead and wear it, child," she said. "That is Jesus' coat."

Under extreme poverty, a young pastor, his wife, and a homeless child were clothed with Christ and they became one.

Let us not forget. We, too, are clothed with Christ. If we lose this truth, we have nothing. But if we believe in this truth and live it, we have everything. Everything indeed.

Thanks be to God.