

Be More Vile
July 30, 2023 Montavilla United Methodist Church
Rev. Heather Riggs

Acts 15: 1-21 The Jerusalem Council Common English Bible

15 Some people came down from Judea teaching the family of believers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom we’ve received from Moses, you can’t be saved.” **2** Paul and Barnabas took sides against these Judeans and argued strongly against their position.

The church at Antioch appointed Paul, Barnabas, and several others from Antioch to go up to Jerusalem to set this question before the apostles and the elders. **3** The church sent this delegation on their way. They traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, telling stories about the conversion of the Gentiles to everyone. Their reports thrilled the brothers and sisters. **4** When they arrived in Jerusalem, the church, the apostles, and the elders all welcomed them. They gave a full report of what God had accomplished through their activity. **5** Some believers from among the Pharisees stood up and claimed, “The Gentiles must be circumcised. They must be required to keep the Law from Moses.”

6 The apostles and the elders gathered to consider this matter. **7** After much debate, Peter stood and addressed them, “Fellow believers, you know that, early on, God chose me from among you as the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and come to believe. **8** God, who knows people’s deepest thoughts and desires, confirmed this by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. **9** He made no distinction between us and them, but purified their deepest thoughts and desires through faith. **10** Why then are you now challenging God by placing a burden on the shoulders of these disciples that neither we nor our ancestors could bear? **11** On the contrary, we believe that we and they are saved in the same way, by the grace of the Lord Jesus.”

12 The entire assembly fell quiet as they listened to Barnabas and Paul describe all the signs and wonders God did among the Gentiles through their activity. **13** When Barnabas and Paul also fell silent, James responded, “Fellow believers, listen to me. **14** Simon reported how, in his kindness, God came to the Gentiles in the first place, to raise up from them a people of God. **15** The prophets’ words agree with this; as it is written,

***16** After this I will return,*

and I will rebuild David's fallen tent;

I will rebuild what has been torn down.

I will restore it

even all the Gentiles who belong to me.

The Lord says this, the one who does these things[\[a\]](#)

18 known from earliest times.

19 “Therefore, I conclude that we shouldn’t create problems for Gentiles who turn to God. **20** Instead, we should write a letter, telling them to avoid the pollution associated with idols, sexual immorality, eating meat from strangled animals, and consuming blood. **21** After all, Moses has been proclaimed in every city for a long time, and is read aloud every Sabbath in every synagogue.”

I have resolved to be more vile.

Why vile? Doesn't vile mean:

- extremely unpleasant.
As in..."he has a vile temper"
- morally bad or wicked.
As in, he is "as vile a rogue as ever lived"

Yes. Vile means those things today, but when John Wesley wrote in his journal, on Monday, April 2, 1739, the word vile had another meaning. To be vile meant to be,

- of little worth or value.

Wesley wrote,

—At four in the afternoon, I submitted to be more vile and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground adjoining to the city, to about three thousand people. The Scripture on which I spoke was this (is it possible anyone should be ignorant that it is fulfilled in every true minister of Christ?): “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the

acceptable year of the Lord" [see *Isa. 61:1, 2; Luke 4:18, 19*].
<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/journal.vi.iii.i.html>

What Wesley, the now revered founder of Methodism, meant was that after having been told that he was not allowed to preach within the boundaries of Anglican parishes that he was not appointed to, and given that Wesley preached against the excesses of the rich, against slavery, and for labor rights, Wesley was unlikely to be appointed to any parish, since most were supported by the Landed Gentry, Wesley decided that, All the world was his parish (<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/journal.vi.iii.v.html>), and he resolved to "be more vile" - that is, to be a worthless street preacher with no fancy pulpit to grant him significance.

And when Wesley started preaching in the fields where farm laborers gathered at the end of the day...

When he started preaching in the market squares where he met the factory workers leaving the woolen mills...

When Wesley went outside the walls of the church...

... he met so many people who were not welcome inside the Church.

Because while "proper" Anglican Priests (with all due respect to my Episcopalian friends, whom I know don't do this now!) While "proper" Anglican Priests of the 18th century spent most of their time caring for the "respectable" members of the church, Wesley was preaching good news to the poor.

- And preaching led to relationships.
- Relationships led to listening.
- Listening led to understanding what kind of changes would be good news to the poor.
- And resolving to be more vile became organizing the people called Methodist to
 - create Sunday schools where factory workers, including the children who worked in the factories, could learn to read and write on their one day off each week
 - To take up offerings to provide micro-loans to help poor workers pay a bill or start a business.
 - To Support the anti-slavery movement, and

- Recognize the harm that alcoholism does and form temperance leagues, even though that was the wrong solution to addressing alcohol addiction, which was not understood at the time.

Being forced outside the walls of the church is probably the best thing that could have happened to the Methodist movement!

A couple weeks ago, on Sunday, July 16th, I shut the doors of the building and gave you the option of attending the Pride Parade or joining zoom worship, and I'm sure that some of you were thinking, "This is vile! Why on earth would a Pastor close the church on Sunday to go to a Gay Pride Parade?"

Well, for the same reason that John Wesley, decided to be more vile and preach outside. Because there's a whole world of people out there, out in our neighborhoods, on our streets, in our local businesses, in our schools, everywhere we go... who don't feel welcome inside a church.

The "gentiles," if you will, of this post-Christian culture.

The kind of people whom Paul and Barnabus were advocating on behalf of in today's scripture reading.

The people who aren't interested in following a bunch of cultural traditions, that don't mean anything to them, but who resonate with the actual Good News of Christ Jesus.

I hope and pray that those of us who represent the institutional church today, will be as brave and compassionate as the Apostle James, who said, "fellow believers, we shouldn't make it difficult for the "gentiles," that is, the unchurched people, to turn to God.

We shouldn't make it difficult for people to turn to God.

So, rather than expecting people who have experienced so much rejection by so many churches to take the risk of coming to our church, I decided to take the risk of being more vile and going out into the streets to march in the Pride Parade as Methodists to say that there are Christians who believe that Jesus loves everyone, no exceptions.

A jolly little group of us decided to be vile together and march in the Pride Parade with Portland First. And since Parades are a bit of a hurry up and wait kind of thing and we were #103, we had some time to hang out and meet some...

Adorable animals

And the Llama's beloved person let people take pictures with him.

And I got some pictures of the floats near us in line like these Farmers.

And the staff from Multnomah County Circuit Court getting their signs ready to hand out.

And Neptune's Court. When I asked to take their picture, they insisted that I be in it, and the young man closest to the wheels, his name is Prince, he asked for a hug. It meant a lot to him that this Pastor was accepting of him.

These fabulous Queens were going to be performing later at the Pride festival on the waterfront.

I'm a trekkie, so I had to get a pick of this Queen in their scant, only to discover that we know each other because they were in the wedding party for my niece's wedding that I officiated!

But probably the best thing about Pride was the number of people who asked for hugs, and told us that they had never before seen a church who believes that Jesus loves them, and that they are Beloved Children of God who are of sacred worth.

On the bus ride home, I took the obligatory Pride bus selfie and teh complete strangers sitting behind me were quite happy to pose with me. They were on their way to work, but also love Pride. I also asked to take a picture of the T-shirt of the teenager sitting across from us with his mom. His T-shirt, in case you can't read it says:

"The Gay agenda:
Monday: Be gay

Tuesday: Be gay
Wednesday: Be Gay
Thursday: Be gay
Friday: Be gay
Saturday: Be gay
Sunday: Be gay”

And that’s the truth. The only gay agenda is just to *live* in a world that is becoming increasingly hostile.

There have been over 520 anti-LGBTQ+ bills introduced in state legislatures here in the US, just this year so far!

And over 220 of those bills specifically target transgender and non-binary people!

502 so far, just this year!!!

Sadly, 70 of those anti-LGBTQ+ bills have been enacted so far this year.

- a. 15 Laws banning gender affirming care for transgender youth:
- b. 7 Laws requiring or allowing misgendering of transgender students:
- c. 2 Laws targeting drag performances:
- d. 3 Laws creating a license to discriminate:
- e. 4 Laws censoring school curriculum, including books:

That’s why we march.

Because at the very beginning of the formation of the Christian Church, the Apostles held a Council in Jerusalem to listen to Paul and Barnabus tell them about how God was causing those Vile, sexually deviant Gentiles to join the Church! (I mean, they were uncircumcised and some of them were even Eunuchs! That’s pretty deviant for the first century!) Peter was worried that maybe we shouldn’t let “those people” be a part of the church. But James listened to Spirit and remembered that passage in Isaiah where God talked about including the Gentiles, so James encouraged them to stop creating barriers to church membership based on old cultural traditions. I like James.

Today Church, I’m asking you to be vile again.

We're sharing our parking lot and our bathrooms, some glitter tattoos, cold water, and our time, with the neighborhood for Montavilla Days because the people who need to hear that Jesus loves them are outside the doors of the church.

So let's go be vile!