



# LESSONS IN LIVING

## *Finding the Love in Paul.*

### *“Part 6: The Sacred is in the Ordinary”*

A St. Andrew’s Sermon  
Delivered by Dr. Jim Rigby  
May 17, 2026

**Scripture Reading:** Romans 1:1-6 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

*From Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart to proclaim the Good News, which God promised long ago through the prophets, as the holy scriptures record—the Good News concerning God’s Only Begotten, who was descended from David according to the flesh, but was made the Only Begotten of God in power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Savior. We have been favored with apostleship, that we may bring to obedient faith all the nations, among whom are you who have been called to belong to Jesus Christ.*

## Sermon

There's an event today in Washington, D.C., which maybe some or most of you have heard about, which is rededicating the United States to the ancient tradition of “One Nation Under God.” And by ancient, of course, I mean 1956, (*Laughter*) because the founders would have never stood still for this.

I think there's one non-Christian speaking at the event. And there are *no* progressive Christians speaking. You need to understand that there are people who do not consider you Christian because you believe in kindness.

One of the most amazing things is they've called it “Jubilee,” which, as a tribute to their ignorance, they have no idea what that means. Jubilee was a year of redistribution of the wealth. Taking care of workers, taking care of fields. The last thing that people want to do.

I'm genuinely nonpartisan in that I want everyone to get their human rights. *Everyone* to get their human rights. But there's a political party that has waged war on public education, on truth and kindness. And I know there are a lot of good people there, but when they called us communists and groomers, you kept silent. So please don't talk about being divisive now. We need you to stand up for everyone. Everyone's human rights matter.

We pass out the inclusive version of the Bible because it's not gendered. It tries to avoid the power things. But it's a very bad translation in some ways too. It translates the word “only begotten one” which is not what is in the Greek text. Interestingly, that phrase, the “only begotten one,” comes from Plato.

Now if you go to Texas A&M, you won't be able to read that (*Laughter*) because the symposium is being censored by the free speech advocates on the right. And the *tragedy* is these are not bad people. They're just deeply, deeply ignorant. And unfortunately, too arrogant to check and see.

So, we have to help each other, and we have to help this nation get out of the bind. We have to take power from the MAGA movement for the same reason we would take keys from the hand of a drunk friend. Not because we hate anybody, but because we love everybody.

There's a quote that I thought of this morning that I want to share. It's one of my favorite quotes in the world. It comes from Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and I think he saw the kind of fascism that was inside many people's idea of Christianity. The idea that there's one way to look at things, that's, that's fascistic. I don't care what the details of it are. He said,

*Whoever begins by loving Christianity more than truth will proceed by loving their own sect or church better than Christianity and end in loving themselves better than all.* – Samuel Taylor Coleridge

What does it mean to be the “offspring of God?” In many parts of the pagan world, that meant that God had slept with your mother. And that's the way a lot of people treat the Christian version. I find it kind of creepy, the idea that earth women are getting impregnated by sky gods. It's very inspirational, (*Laughter*) but I don't think we'll quite get to equal rights for the genders as long as we have that kind of a view.

It also was referring to the rulers of the world. And part of what the ironic symbolism was supposed to be is here this peasant has been lifted up. A lamb is on the throne. Which isn't saying that they're good people that should be bullying everybody else. It's that bullying is always wrong, that kindness needs to be our guide. So that dismantles all systems of power. The gospel dismantles all domination. If we hear it— the kingdom of God is different than the kingdoms of the world. It doesn't need a boss.

So, Paul's going to say something that's really amazing if you think about it. Instead of choosing any of the traditional versions of Jesus being the Son of God, he says, “*according to the flesh, he was the descendant of David. According to the spirit, through the resurrection, he was considered the child of God.*” Matthew also has an adoption story of how Jesus becomes the Son of God. In that, he's appointed as Son of God. It's not genetic, it's deeper than that.

When we realize that all of us are children of God, we come closer to what the symbol is trying to call us to. The only way it can be understood. There can't be some of us in and some of us out. That would not be a universal God. Like some people hate other people. Remember what Jesus

said? God's love is like the sunlight. It doesn't select between the just and the unjust. The Church needs to remember that. Jesus needs to get at least one vote on what his message is going to be.

And America needs to decide whether Jesus is a mascot for the American Empire or an ambassador for a love that knows no bounds. To be the child of God means to love the way God loves. Everybody in, nobody out.

Now, you can't turn that into an industry the way the Church has done, but it's the best way to live I can think of. And Christianity has no copyright on it. How can there be a copyright on universal love? What arrogance.

So, the first thing I think our passage calls us to consider is that we are children of the universe itself. If you forget everything you've been taught by preachers and other problematic persons (*Laughter*) and say, "*just what do I know, looking at my life?*" You *know* that you're somehow an expression of something in the universe that's creative. You're born out of *something* that is creative. You were born from the heart of the universe is part of what that means, to understand yourself as being an offspring of God.

This idea, you find it in Stoicism. That word "logos" that you see, the "Word" that's in John, is the generative principle of the universe, and it's not confined to human beings. So, to call God "parent" can totally miss the point.

What is the generative principle of life itself? Of being itself. It can't just be a human being because trees come from it too. So, it's a seed-like something that gives birth to all that has life, all that has form.

Many ancient people thought that human capacity to do math and to recognize patterns was the imprinted word of God, and anyone who tuned their heart and mind to that pattern was then a child of God. And that's Stoicism. But other people have said it very well too. This is Maya Angelou. She said:

*Stand up straight and realize who you are, that you tower over your circumstances. You are a child of God. Stand up straight.*

I think that's part of what Paul is trying to call us to.

According to the *flesh*, we're defined by all kinds of things, but more deeply and profoundly, more spiritually, that impulse inside of us toward truth, toward beauty, toward goodness, is the expression of the depths of the universe.

The first idea is that you and I are expressions of the heart of the universe. The second is that it calls us to wholeness, not to choose sides, but to be universal. Some people say, *how do we know that the universe even knows we're here?* Again, if you just look at your experience, you just study physics, you find that every particle in the universe resonates with every other particle.

I think the ancients were having mystical experiences of these basic truths. And you need, in my opinion, to build around what you know, what your real experience is, and not to take other people's words for that. Because I think the ancients were trying to share experiences and insights that they had, but you have to discover them in your own life, or they're not going to be worth anything for you.

Martin Luther King Jr., in one of the most prophetic writings of any time, struggling for civil rights, he realized that he was a part of the tragedy that was happening in Vietnam, and he felt a call as a universal citizen to oppose that war. And other civil rights leaders, other newspapers, magazines condemned him roundly. And yet looking back, it's very, very clear. That was not a war about protecting democracy. It was a war about defending colonial empire.

And so, *you* will have to decide between the Jesus who *liberates* and a Jesus who *dominates*. In Washington, they'll be celebrating a Jesus who dominates. Is that a love that encompasses us all?

Simone Weil said,

*The children of God should not have any other country here below but the universe itself, with the totality of all the reasoning creatures it has ever contained, contains, or ever will contain. That is the native city to which we owe our love.*

And that's also Stoicism 101. We are cells in a common body. The reason within us is the generative principle that governs the universe, and it's written inside of us. That's why we can do math. That's why we can do music. Those are patterns written within our tissue itself. We are the Word made flesh. Not just Jesus; *every* being. And we can't recognize it in ourselves without seeing it in each other.

Then the third thing I think Paul is trying to share with us: Jesus was not able to change the world in his lifetime. The Romans were in control when he was born. The Romans were in control when he died.

We very possibly will not be able to change the world in our own lifetime, but we have something just as important and even more foundational that we can make our hearts a temple that gives light through the time of midnight. That's what Dr. King was doing. That's what Coleridge was doing. I think that's what Paul was trying to do.

If we could change the laws, we would. But can we teach people how to be human beings first? We can get so focused on the problem we don't realize that we need to manifest the answer.

Richard Rohr put it like this:

*All great spirituality teaches about letting go of what you don't need and who you are not. Then when you can get little enough, and naked enough and poor enough, you'll find the littlest place where you really are, ironically, is more than*

*enough and is all that you need. At that place, you will have nothing to prove to anyone and nothing to protect. That place is called freedom. It's the freedom of the children of God. Such people can connect with everybody. They don't feel the need to eliminate anybody.*

In an evolving universe, we never get to the finish line. Can you make it enough to walk your path fully, joyfully, peacefully? While “according to the flesh” things are not the way you designed them, can you *manifest* the nobility of your origins? When we do that, our heart becomes home. It becomes an inner fortress that the world cannot give or take away from.

Madeleine L'Engle said:

*The journey homewards. Coming home, that's what it's all about. The journey to the coming of the kingdom. That's probably the chief difference between the Christian and the secular artist, [although that's a silly thing to say]. The purpose of the work, be it story or music or painting, is to further the coming of the kingdom, to make us aware of our status as children of God and to turn our feet toward home.*

I don't believe Christianity has a copyright on this kind of love. I think all great art does that.

So, as you leave here and go to a world that's hurting so badly, can you let yourself stop being defined by the situation?

It was so funny a couple of weeks ago when John Cornyn was publishing lies that I had supposedly said that I hadn't said. And I owe it to the Stoics. I was so peaceful because they're the ones who taught me to live in my character, not in my reputation. You have *no* control over your reputation. What peace of mind it is to know that and to just cut that off, let it go.

“According to the flesh,” you're an American. You're probably of a gender. You're probably left-handed or right-handed. You probably have a certain color hair, if you have hair. *(Laughter)* But none of that says who you are. Who you are comes from the heart of the universe. And there's nothing that can happen to you to rob you of that if you don't let go of it.

You come from the heart of the universe. You were called to be a citizen of the whole. When you live like that, your heart will be a palace. It will feel like heaven. It will be heaven. Because heaven is not the destination, it's the path.

But please know, in this time and place, you're being asked to choose between a Jesus who is a mascot of the American Empire and a beloved child of God who's come to teach you that you are also a beloved child of God, and to look around you and realize that is all you see.

Well, that's my struggle with the text. We'll take a moment for you to think about how you would have preached it.

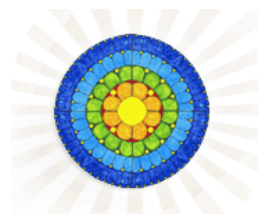
## Benediction

Rev. Babs Miller

You heard Jim tell us that we are citizens of the universe. And as that, we have a call to be that loving presence in every chance we get. And so I would remind each of you that each of you is a child of that wonderful spirit of love that we sometimes call God. And that spirit knows when you skin your knee or your heart. That spirit knows when you admire a butterfly or cry in the darkness.

So go out into this wonderful creation and tell the whole world that they are loved just exactly as they are. Go and kiss the hurts of this world. Go and laugh and play in the fields of grace and love. Go in peace. Amen.

*Transcribed and edited by a member of the St. Andrew's Sermon Transcription Project.*



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