

“The World Turned Upside Down!”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden
for FUMC Grand Junction, Sunday, May 16, 2021

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ
website: <https://www.fumcgj.org/sermons/>

Scripture Text:

Gal. 3:1-9, 23-29 [NRSV]

OPENING

(*40 seconds or so (from 03:19 to 04:02) from the last part of “The World Turned Upside Down” from the musical *Hamilton*:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDe3qI_J5iY*)

Originally, the song “The World Turned Upside Down” was a British drinking song, composed as a satirical piece protesting the policies of Parliament relating to – of all things – the celebration of Christmas! [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_World_Turned_Upside_Down]

But there’s more to the story...the song was composed in the 1640’s at the end of the First English Civil War, a war in which the Puritans were allied with the Parliamentarians against the Royalists – a war the Puritans and Parliamentarians won.

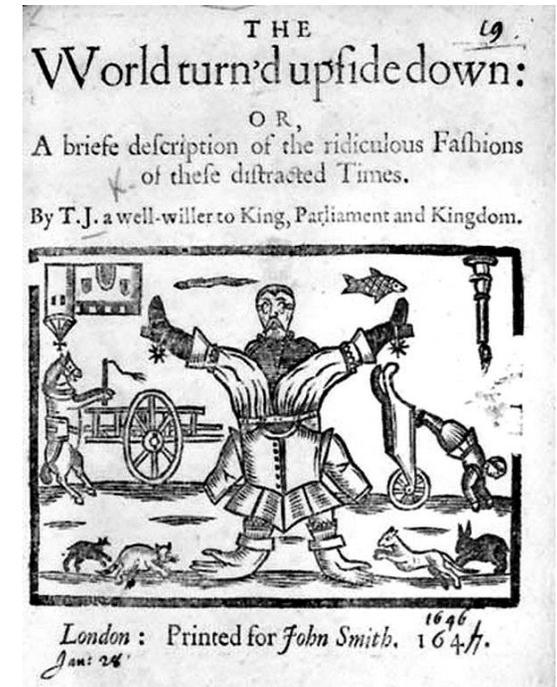
The Puritans felt the Protestant Reformation in the Church of England had not gone far enough, so they convinced Parliament to institute a host of regulations aimed at purging as much of the old Roman Catholic heritage as possible from English culture and their practice of the Christian faith.

With that culture and those practices went many of the much-loved traditions of the common folk, among them many of their traditions at Christmastime. To be honest, there was probably a fair amount of drunken reverie involved that was, no doubt, offensive to the Puritan sense of “the appropriate”, especially for Christmas!

But to the main populace, it seemed that the world had, indeed, turned upside down – as can be seen in this woodcut taken from a poster from that era.

Let me share with you the first stanza of the ballad, “The World Turned Upside Down”, to give you a feel for the lyric that inspired the artwork:

*Listen to me and you shall hear,
news hath not been this thousand year:
Since Herod, Caesar, and many more,
you never heard the like before.
Holy-dayes are despis'd, new fashions are devis'd.
Old Christmas is kickt out of Town.
Yet let's be content, and the times lament,
you see the world turn'd upside down. [Ibid.]*



And...that's still not all... American Revolutionary War legend holds that "...the British army band under Lord Cornwallis played this tune ["The World Turned Upside Down"] when they surrendered after the Siege of Yorktown (1781). Customarily, the British army would have played an American or French tune in tribute to the victors, but General Washington refused them the honors of war and insisted [instead] that they play 'a British or German march'." [Ibid.] Hence, Lyn-Manuel Miranda's reference to this piece in his brilliant historical musical, *Hamilton*.

TO THE SCRIPTURES

But the reference to "the world turned upside down" – and my sermon title – goes back *well beyond* the American Revolution and the First English Civil War. It turns up in Acts 17 on the lips of some very angry Jewish townspeople in the Greek city of Thessalonica, describing the effect that Paul and his entourage were having in the places they went preaching about Jesus: *they were turning the world upside down* with their message (cf. Acts 17:6b).

It wasn't a matter of theological hair-splitting that Paul was engaging in. The stakes were high for him – nothing less consequential than the means of eternal salvation. (* Expound on this below in his wrestling match with Law and Grace below.*)

SERMON THOUGHTS

- Law and Grace
 - Paul was not "antinomian", one who advocated for licentiousness. He, like Martin Luther 15 centuries later, was relieved b/c he knew he couldn't keep the Law perfectly, something that tormented him. (*This is apparent in many of Paul's letters, dealt with variously as the local situation called for, but nowhere with such *pathos* as in the latter half of Romans 7.
 - Paul: The Law serves its purpose when it convicts of sin. Only Christ can redeem through His sacrificial death on the cross, bearing all sin and the consequences thereof in his body for the sake of the world.
 - So committed to this principle was Paul that he would assert earlier in this letter (Gal. 2:21) that if the works of the Law could save, Christ died for nothing.
 - The upshot was this, Gal. 3:27 & 29:
27 As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ... 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.
 - For Paul, this established for the Gentile Christians in Galatia the security of their salvation though faith in Christ alone, without their having to keep the Jewish Law.
- But what turned the world upside down was the verse in between:

²⁸ There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

CONCLUSION

I believe that insight from Paul continues to turn the world upside down, as if cats were chasing dogs and horses were driving carts ahead of them (ref. to the 1646 woodcut shown earlier).

While Paul was, undoubtedly, making reference to common categories of distinction in his day that ordered community life.

- Racial / Cultural / religious order (Jew / Greek)
- Economic order (Slave / Free) and
- Social order (Male / Female)

These were distinctions by which people drew lines that separated them from one another and established hierarchies of importance and dominance in their world.

Paul's assertion invites us to look at the categories of distinction we use in our own day and subject them to the reality that all who profess to be disciples of Jesus Christ are one in Him.

Unity in Christ is a fruit of the Holy Spirit that ripens in our midst when we embrace this truth.

The question for us to deal with in the week ahead is, "What are the categories of distinction you use – What are the categories of distinction I use – to create *unGodly* distance between ourselves and others?"

Paradoxically, "the world turning upside down" doesn't happen by us focusing on trying to erase the lines we draw between ourselves and others. It happens by us focusing on answering the call of Jesus in each of our lives to follow Him and Him alone with single-minded allegiance and commitment.

Only then do we "win" – and not some fleeting, worldly victory...but the eternal battle waged from the beginning for the reign of God to be visible in the world, *this world*, "a world turned upside down".



Prayer Concerns

✝ Prayers of Thanksgiving:

1. Betty Allen, recovering at home
2. Ray Cameron, recovering at home.

✝ Continued prayers for the following families who've lost loved ones recently:

1. Hickmans, Maurina d. 5/1/21
2. Meiningers, Ray d. 5/2/21
3. Dunlaps, Kate Voss d. 5/6/21

✝ Israel / Holy Land