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**Forward, Together**  
Galatians 6:11-18

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Motion is everywhere.

Inevitable as the sunrise and incontrovertible as life itself, motion is the default state of matter. From electrons orbiting the tiniest atoms to mind numbingly large galaxies that spin around each other locked in a cosmic dance, motion is everywhere. The universe doesn't ask or invite us to come along for the ride, it moves on its own volition, faster than you can imagine.

Physically, it might take a year for the earth to revolve around the sun, but the sun takes about 220 million years to make its way across the galaxy, meaning in a hundred lifetimes you are never going to be in the same place twice. Biologically, every 7-10 years, most of the 75 trillion cells that make up your body will be replaced, making you a completely new person than you were a decade ago. Psychologically, every interaction you have and every conversation you hear is slowly rewiring the pathways in your brain, and so you never make the same decision twice. And yet, despite having a brand new body, in a brand new place, with a brand new consciousness, still we dig in our heels and refuse to acknowledge the motion of the universe.

Galatians is a letter about movement. Written in about the year 60, it was written into a context where Jewish nationalism was the hot topic of the day. Rebellion was about to break out in Jerusalem, and there was a drive among many to make Judaism more pure. If Christianity was going to be under the umbrella of Judaism, then Christians were going to have to make themselves more Jewish. Paul wrote this letter to remind the churches in Galatia and churches today that Christ has done something new in the world, that creation itself is changing – and there is no going back. Movement is inevitable.

We don't have a say in whether or not we're moving. But what we do have a say in, Paul tells us, is where we move, and how. His plea for the church in Galatia, and I think his plea for us today, would be this and only this: forward, together.

See what large letters Paul writes this with. CAPS LOCK is on. Paul wants to grab the attention of the casual reader who might just be skimming the text. If you miss everything else, don't miss this:

**Move Forward**

The first half of Paul's conclusion is a definitive rejection of the idea that motion is a choice.

Galatians represents for the church a conversation. Throughout the letter, Paul is single minded in his devotion to clarifying this one topic, and exemplifying why it matters as much as he seems to think it does. The heart of the Galatian gospel is that the cross has to be enough. To

add anything, any requirements onto the most basic truth of Christianity is to imply that somehow, what Jesus did was insufficient to save.

Think about that for a second.

Paul isn't arguing against people who don't believe that Jesus was who he said he was, or that he rose from the dead. Paul is arguing against those who say that those two realities are simply not enough. The law needs to be obeyed, the rules need to be followed. Christians are Jews, they argue, and Jews are a people marked by circumcision.

By all regards, Paul seems like the last person you'd think would be making this argument. Earlier in the letter he makes a point of saying that he's one of the circumcised. Not only that, but he trumpets his credentials. You'd think that, if Paul is really being a progressive here, he'd be arguing for some kind of a compromise – some sort of tolerable middle ground between two extreme positions. Whether it's politics or debates in the church, the nature of human dialogue is to move the needle as slowly as possible.

But what's natural isn't always what's right.

Sometimes the needle needs to spike, and sometimes the compromises need to be abandoned in the pursuit of a deeper truth and a greater reality. Sometimes the

**Paul recognizes that Motion is oriented toward Mission.** He sees the trajectory God is moving in and pushes the church to move in the same direction. He looks and sees men, women and children coming to faith in Jesus Christ, raised and reigning in the gentile communities of Galatia in much greater numbers than in the Jewish communities where Christianity began. He sees the trend that it won't be long before Christianity becomes more Gentile than it is Jewish and the conversation will change on its own – but how much time and energy would be wasted in the meanwhile?

And history proved Paul right. When the Bible was being compiled three hundred years after this letter was written, it was included because the compilers saw in Paul's grasp of Grace a forward thinking perspective. **DON'T WASTE TIME ON DISCUSSIONS TODAY THAT ARE GOING TO BE SETTLED TOMORROW!** There will always be conversations that the church will have where compromise will be required, but when the church seeks to follow God in mission and that leads us forward by leaps and bounds we need to be able to leap. There are times where the church needs to spike the needle and Paul's message here is clear: do not be held back from the direction that God is calling you to for fear of the people that God has placed around you. No one gets to hold the church for ransom when it comes to moving forward for mission. It doesn't matter how long you've been here or how much you give; it doesn't matter what your last name is or how involved you are; it doesn't matter if you're an elder a minister or a visitor – today, as St. Andrew's moves into this new year of mission, it is my pleasure to tell you that we are moving forward. Sometimes by compromise, and sometimes by leaps and bounds.

## Move Together

And we're doing it together.

If you've ever been white water rafting, it's almost a perfect analogy for the church. Here are a group of people careening down a river that by every metric is trying to kill you. The water is frigid, it's moving at a breakneck pace, and there are huge jagged rocks jutting out of the water and sticks and branches the size of your leg strewn everywhere. And so a group of people from all different walks of life huddle together on a fragile boat and throw themselves into the thick of it. But they're not alone. They have a guide with them who has been trained in rafting, who has dedicated years to the sport, and who every day commits to walking up and down the river bank, learning the every changing curves and paying attention to new branches that have fallen. But his or her job isn't to paddle. They sit in the middle of the raft and give out orders. If anyone on the raft doesn't listen, everyone is in trouble.

It's the same with the church. We're only effective if we're all working together. It's Jan's job and my job to chart the course and know the terrain – to walk the river bank ahead of you week after week, but you're the ones who have to paddle and you're the ones who have to paddle together.

Because too much is at stake not to. As we enter into a time of discernment together as a church locally and nationally – as we have theological conversations with each other, as we read the bible together, as we search for a third minister – we have to be on the same page. And here in this passage Paul lays out four criteria for making sure that we're all on the same page:

Is my attention squarely on the cross?

In other words, am I recognizing my own brokenness and listening for Christ's call to pick up our own cross and follow?

Are the world's ways of thinking about things firmly behind me?

In other words, is my approach about me having control, or about God having control?

Am I adding anything to that isn't essential?

In other words, is this going to get in the way of connecting the gospel with new people?

Will this bring us closer to the new creation?

In other words, how important is this issue to the mission of the church?

And so the church is equipped for mission, for moving forward together

The church is moving. Faster and further down the river than many of us would prefer. But the movement is inevitable. Our job is to be faithful to the one who is the still point in the turning universe: the one who never changes, who is the same yesterday today and forever.

And so if in the middle of change you feel alone, take heart this morning – because without you even noticing, Jesus is present. Through common means of bread and wine, he makes his presence known, and with a reminder of his never failing faithfulness and boundless love, he invites all here who know him to come to the table. Come and eat bread and never be hungry again. Come and drink from a cup that never runs dry. Come and find stillness in the turning universe. The Table is open, the meal is prepared, and the invitation is yours. This is not a Presbyterian table, nor is it St. Andrew's table. This is not a Calgarian or a Canadian table. This is the table of the Lord who beckons his whole church forward, together.

And so let us declare together the faith we share, using the ancient words of the Apostle's creed.