

Date: 3rd July 2011

Sermon: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald

Reading: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

I am sure that most of you will understand exactly what I mean if I say that toddlers aren't afraid of anything. When one of my wee boys comes running towards me with a closed fist – I immediately hold my breath, because the last time that happened, I was - very excitedly - handed a spider, still alive, might I add, and neither of the boys were very pleased with my reaction... But in a sense this makes me grateful that we are not living in Africa anymore, because just the thought of all the insects and lizards they could lay their hands on there already makes me shiver!

Talking about lizards – one of the most amazing creatures I have ever come across, is a chameleon. As you probably all know, a chameleon is a lizard that changes colour – if it sits on a green leaf, for instance, it will turn green, or when it sits on a brown rock, it will turn brown. A chameleon blends in with its surroundings perfectly, in order to become invisible to its enemies. It's a method of camouflage. It's a matter of survival really, because if the chameleon's enemies can't see it, it will stay safe and alive.

In a sense I think that we as Christians sometimes act like chameleons too. We do our best to blend in, we do whatever the groups we're a part of expect us to do, even if we know deep down that what we are doing is not right. We try to disappear into the background and not to stand out at all, because this is the easiest way to survive.

It is much easier to just be "one of them". Easier? Yes. But right? No. Christians are not supposed to take on the character of our surroundings, of the sinful world, because Christ made us new people. We are *supposed* to stand out, to be different, to bring people closer to God and never to be a stumbling block for our brothers and sisters in faith.

And this is exactly what the apostle Paul refers to in his letter to the Corinthians.

Corinth was a world renowned, wealthy city. It had a big harbour and was the gateway to the rest of the world. So lots of different people, from different backgrounds and faiths made it their home. The Christians were by far the minority and the lifestyle of the people around them didn't make it easy for them to live out their faith. Particularly because not that long ago, most of them were *part* of the people who felt that they had the whole world in their hands and could thus do absolutely anything they pleased to do.

In those days they didn't have something like butcheries. The custom was to slaughter animals in the idol temples while at the same time this meat was sacrificed to the idols. The priests who worked in these temples then took some of the meat for themselves, and the rest they sold at the marketplace. There was no other place to purchase meat from, which meant that if you wanted to eat meat, you'd have to accept the fact that this meat has been sacrificed to an idol earlier.

The Christians in Corinth were disagreeing about whether it was right or wrong to eat such meat, and Paul tried to help them resolve the issue. He said that since all of them knew that there is only one God and that idols don't really exist, it means absolutely nothing that the meat is sacrificed to idols and nobody can be harmed in any way by eating it.

BUT – and with this BUT Paul reminded them that being a Christian means that you are not supposed to be a stumbling block – but what if eating meat that was sacrificed to an idol reminds someone of their life before Christ and makes them fall back into a wrong way of living?

Is there nothing wrong with eating the meat *then*?! Paul left it up to the Corinthians to decide for themselves, but he said that if *he* knows that eating meat will make his brother or sister fall into sin, he himself will *never* eat meat again.

That would be a very trying thing to do in a world where the word vegetarian did not even exist, but Paul would rather give up his own pleasure than cause someone else's fall.

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It is just so much easier to conform than it is to stand up for what is right. It is so much easier to satisfy our own needs than it is to look out for the needs of others. But the fact that it is easier does not mean that it is right.

We have different issues from the people who lived in Corinth many, many years ago – but the same principle applies to us today if we are in a situation where we do not know what the right thing is to do: and this principle is to never be a stumbling block, to always act out of love for our fellow Christians.

Even if we don't really know them or like them that much – we must build people up, encourage them and help them up if they fall, we can never be the cause of somebody losing their way, because that is the direct opposite of what it means to be a Christian.

And we have to *always* do this. Even if it means that we have to give up something we really love, because not a single thing that is important to us can

be more important than obeying God. I know this sounds radical, but what is *not* radical about being a new person in Christ?

Jesus gave up his *life* for us. Compared to *that* – *no* sacrifices we have to make can ever be too big. Especially because we don't have to do it alone – we have God's Spirit to guide us and even carry us if we need it.

May God give you, Connor and Liezl, the courage to stand out and make wise decisions in your upbringing of Willow, because if she grows up in a home filled with love and Christian values, it will be easy for her too to make the right choices when she grows older.

Let's not be chameleons. Let's rather be fireflies – people who not only stand out in our surroundings, but also show others the way to go.

Amen.