

Sermon

“Bearing One Another’s Burdens”

A Sermon for First Presbyterian Church

Sunday, July 7, 2019

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Psa. 30:0 A Psalm. A Song at the dedication of the temple. Of David.

- 1 I will extol you, O LORD, for you have drawn me up,
and did not let my foes rejoice over me.*
- 2 O LORD my God, I cried to you for help,
and you have healed me.*
- 3 O LORD, you brought up my soul from Sheol,
restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.*

*Psa. 30:4 Sing praises to the LORD, O you his faithful ones,
and give thanks to his holy name.*

- 5 For his anger is but for a moment;
his favor is for a lifetime.
Weeping may linger for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.*

*Psa. 30:6 As for me, I said in my prosperity,
“I shall never be moved.”*

- 7 By your favor, O LORD,
you had established me as a strong mountain;
you hid your face;
I was dismayed.*

*Psa. 30:8 To you, O LORD, I cried,
and to the LORD I made supplication:*

- 9 “What profit is there in my death,
if I go down to the Pit?
Will the dust praise you?
Will it tell of your faithfulness?*
- 10 Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me!*

O LORD, be my helper!”

*Psa. 30:11 You have turned my mourning into dancing;
 you have taken off my sackcloth
 and clothed me with joy,
12 so that my soul may praise you and not be silent.
 O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever.*

Gal. 6:1 My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. 4 All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. 5 For all must carry their own loads.

Gal. 6:6 Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher.

I. We Are Well into Summer!

- A. Past the festivities of the 4th.**
- B. Into the new routine of Summer recreation**
- C. The mild June has given way to only a slightly hotter July — Lord knows I love Summers in ND!**
- D. And we are in a second Lord's Day worship which focusses on the Apostle Paul's letter to the Galatian church.**
- E. Last week - Chapter 5 with its list of powerful gifts of the Spirit.**
- F. Today Paul's concluding remarks.**

- II. Paul is writing a church he loves . . . but one which is also a vexation to him.**
- A. In Paul’s mind, he gave them a clear teaching about the gospel of God’s amazing grace and they should not be tempted away from that gracious gospel by other options.**
- 1. Namely, they should not make it a rule that people must follow the whole of the Mosaic Law (most prominently men being circumcised) but rather should welcome all people in a community set free from such rules.**
 - 2. Last week, Paul described that “freedom” not as freedom to pursue self-interest and libertine ways, but rather the freedom of being deeply and tenaciously committed to a life of mutual service.**
 - a. Following the example of Jesus, he names that service as being enslaved to one another.**

III. Today Paul turns the corner and begins the end of his letter.

- A. He knows the community of the church is not perfect.**
- 1. Members individually (and the community as a whole too) can and will be detected in transgression.**
 - 2. When that happens the community is to “restore such a one in gentleness.”**

- B. Let us not read past that too quickly.**
- 1. The church has a complicated history on the subject of restoration of those who transgress.**
 - a. Sometimes being too narrow and judgmental in our treatment of those we see as not measuring up to the stature of a disciple of Christ.**
 - b. At other times we have failed to hold clergy and lay-people alike accountable for grievous actions which have injured those entrusted to our care.**
 - 2. “Restoring such transgressors in gentleness” can be misunderstood as the need to cover up and ignore real problems in the community of faith.**
 - 3. It is a difficult calculation to make: as thin as a razor’s edge — to know when to punish and when to forgive — and the church as a whole has not always gotten this right.**
- C. Paul seems to know how easy it is to get this wrong because his very next sentence is, “Take care that you yourselves are not tempted.”**
- 1. One the one hand to be too lenient and “forgiving” to the point of failing to hold people accountable for transgressions.**
 - 2. On the other hand of becoming the arbiters of good and evil (a sin whose consequences we discovered in the garden of Eden) and embarking on a self-righteous kind of judgement and exclusivism which fails to**

understand that the church is more like a hospital for sinners than it is a museum of saints.

IV. The close connection of Humility and Gentleness.

A. Stolen gas-cap story

B. Rita washing dishes - listening to me rant about some person arrested in our community...

1. “I remember someone who stole a gas-cap once...”

C. My mother, in humility and gentleness had been sitting on the knowledge of my misdeed for *months* waiting for the teachable moment.

1. Her tears of grief over my hypocrisy were far more effective at inviting my own reflection on my sin than any quick and harsh punishment she might have meted out to me whenever she first learned of my transgression.

V. So how can we best follow our Lord?

A. How do we walk the razor’s edge between

- 1. self-righteous judgment on the one hand and**
- 2. hypocritical smoothing over and hiding of real transgressions on the other?**

B. Paul counsels that we “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

1. Bearing the burdens of those harmed keeps us in touch with the real consequence of sin and will keep us from too easily passing over or ignoring things which the law of love demand

that we confront.

- 2. Bearing the burdens of those who have transgressed keeps us in touch with not only *their* brokenness — but also *our own* because the wisdom of our faith urges us to acknowledge that we will find nothing alien to ourselves in another child of God.**
- 3. One of my literary mentors passed away not too long ago....but I have given thanks for him many times as I read his thoughts.**
 - a. John Mogabgab was editor of Upper Room publishing and, in particular, *Weavings* a quarterly journal of faith which ran for many years.**

Burdens. Paul understood that if the yoke of Christ is easy and his burden light (Matt 11:29), nevertheless the road that leads to life is hard and the entry is narrow (Matt 7:14). When rough terrain and tight passages lead to loss of spiritual balance, even light loads can seem heavy and unwieldy. What a gracious blend of respectful self-restraint and humble self-offering are needed to lift the weight from another's back without intrusion or offense, offering instead a time of rest and refreshment to a weary friend in Christ. Tender regard for others, inspired by God's solicitous love for us, can do much to smooth the path and enlarge the horizon for those with whom we travel down the years."

John Mogabgab in *Weavings* XIX:4 2004 p.2

VI. Paul's counsel to the church is aimed at transformation

A. The life of discipleship is a life of perpetual transformation - what Jesus told Nicodemus was

such a profound transformation that it was like being “born from above.”

- B. Paul in his second letter to Corinth said it this way: 2Cor. 5:17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”
- C. In Galatians 6:15-16 Paul comes to this conclusion: “For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them.”

VII. Today we worship in the presence of a Lord’s Table laden with the gifts of God.

- A. Gifts which are meant to sustain us on the road of our struggles to live as transformed people.
- B. They are not reserved for those who imagine themselves perfect:
 - 1. Paul writes: “For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves.”
- C. No - this is a table set for us by sinners
Presided over by sinners
Served to us by sinners
And *meant* to be gifts of grace to sustain *sinners*.
- D. So come, receive from the hand of God gifts meant to restore you in a Spirit of gentleness.

Charge: “So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up” (v. 9).