

Written Copy: Bearing Burdens and Carrying Loads – Galatians 6:1-5

Proper 9, 4th Sunday after Pentecost

Sunday July 7th, 2019

Text: Galatians 6:1-5

¹ Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ³ For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. ⁵ For each will have to bear his own load.

Exegetical Statement

We the Church, those who have repentant hearts and active faith are to act as our brother's keepers. We should be watching for anyone who is lapsing into unrepentant sin and is struggling to walk by the Spirit. We are to work together to restore them to repentant faith with a spirit of gentle strength that remembers there but by the grace of God go we. We are to be patient yet persistent, coming alongside them and helping them with those heavy burdens, be they monetary, temporal, or emotional that can accompany a lapsing of faith. We are called to help them carry these things in a sacrificial way that may involve giving of our time, talents, and treasures. As we go about this, we keep watch over ourselves lest we in coming alongside our lapsing brother are also drawn into sin. We especially watch for prideful thinking regarding our not being in their place and thinking we are better than they when we are not. It is good for each of us to examine how the fruits of the Spirit are being played out in our actions and boast in that-how the Spirit is improving our work for His kingdom. Each of us are called to do good works, first for our brothers and sisters in Christ, but also for those we encounter in vocation. This our cross, our load to carry and it often means a sacrificing of time, talents, and treasures. God brings those into our midst who encourage and teach us how to be better servants for Christ and His people and in return the Church needs to compensate them and provide them a living wage. We are warned to avoid the temptation to act or pretend we are sacrificially giving and loving because God will not allow us to continually mock Him, justice will one day be served either in this life or the next. Our works are to spring from our new life in Christ and not from the old sinful self we should be continually being put to death. We remember that change happens in God's own timing and we serve as He provides opportunity, not according to our timetable and at our convenience. In order to avoid weariness and our own lapsing into sin we are called to make use of His means of grace which provide us with the needed inner strength to do the loving ministry we are called to do amongst the Church and our neighbors.

Focus Statement:

Christ came along side us in coming to earth. He has taken a personal interest in us by taking upon Himself that burden of sin and its punishment that we could never carry and gave all that He had to save us. He still comes to us in Word and Sacrament to keep us in the faith and able to build one another up so that we do not fall away

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

Sometimes we "mind our own business" when it comes to the spiritual lives of our own brothers and sisters. We don't want to intrude and therefore fail to follow Christ's command to love one another as He has loved us. When we do intrude we lack patience and a firm yet gentle hand. We are reluctant to act when to do so may mean a sacrifice of our time, talents, treasures

What the hearer should do as a result:

Be ready to carry the burdens of one another when the consequences of sin become too much realizing that Jesus calls us to love sacrificially. This call to love others with our time, talent, and treasure. We remain empowered to do so by regular participation in the means of grace. This sacrifice to remain built up and to love others is our load to carry as individual members of His Church

Subject Sentence: Our burden is to loving carry each other's loads.

There was a man named Sadhu Sundar who was converted from Hinduism to Christianity. He then served as Christian missionary in India during the early 20th century. As the story goes, he was traveling on foot through the Himalayas with a Buddhist Monk heading towards a monastery. They needed to seek shelter from the bitter cold and snow. They needed to hurry to arrive before dark fell so that they might not succumb to the elements. The wind was blowing, the snow was pelting their cheeks like bits of sand being blown by the wind. As they were carefully navigating the path alongside a steep cliff, they heard a voice crying out for help. Looking around they noticed a man who had fallen down the side of the cliff and lay below them. He appeared to be injured. The monk looked at Sundar and said, "Do not stop. God has brought this man to his fate. He must work it out for himself. You and I need to hurry on before we likewise perish."

Now the chances of us encountering a similar predicament are pretty slim. But Paul in our Epistle Lesson is calling us to help those around us who have fallen off a spiritual cliff and are in need. Those who are in danger of falling away from the faith. Paul says in **Galatians 6:2** that we need to "**Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.**" But then three verses later in **Galatians 6:5** he says "**For each will have to bear his own load.**" So which is it? When do we need to worry about bearing someone else's burdens and when should we focus on carrying our own load? When should we worry about the man who has fallen down off the cliff and when do we leave him to help himself and bear his own load?

Maybe it would help to look at a 'for instance' that hits closer to home. Once upon a time there was a man named Jim who faithfully attended "Abiding Presence Lutheran Church" in Somewheresville USA. Jim was a retired accountant who liked to spend his time wood working in his garage and tinkering around with small engines for mowers and tractors. Down the street from Jim lived Steve and his family. Steve used to be a regular attender at Abiding Presence but had been fading from view in the past year. Jim had heard that he lost his job. But instead of being out looking for another Jim saw his truck parked at the corner bar a lot. Steve's house was beginning to look run down, the shutters were sitting cockeyed and the roof of his porch was sagging. Steve's wife had taken a job at the nearby Coney

restaurant as a waitress. Then a couple weeks ago Steve had a party at the house. It got out of hand and the police were called. After this his wife took some of her things and left. Jim noticed him sitting alone on his dilapidated porch, beer in hand, looking lost, beaten down, and dejected. Jim's wife who was in the car with him suggested Jim stop by and talk to him. Jim responded, "Why? He got what's coming to him. That's what happens when you leave God behind and party with the world. Maybe one day he will wake up and return to Church. Then God might turn his life around."

Now Jim is not a real person. Jim is a little bit you and a little bit me. He is that part of us that can be very judgmental and very unwilling to help those who we believe should help themselves. A pastor and evangelist named **F.B. Meyer** from the early 20th century once said that **'when we see a brother or sister in sin, there are three things we do not know: First, we do not know how hard he or she tried not to sin. Second, we do not know the power of the forces that assailed him or her. Thirdly, we also do not know what we would have done in the same circumstances.** Sometimes the cliffs that we slip off from are too far down for us to pull ourselves up.

This is the point that Paul is getting at in the first five verses of our Epistle Lesson. He is thinking back to the question Cain asked God after he killed his brother and is telling us: 'Yes, you are your brother's keeper.' Paul tells us in **Galatians 6:1-2** **"¹ Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."** We as the Church are supposed to watch out for one another. And those of us who are "spiritual", meaning those who are living out our lives- not perfectly without sin, but with lives of repentant faith. You and I, we are to come along side those who are struggling and share Christ's love with them through word and action. And who might these be? Those who have stopped coming to church. Those whose lives show that they are falling away from faith. Those who have fallen into alcohol or drug addiction, lost jobs, are having marital difficulties. Those who are depressed. Those who are letting their health and home slip. We are to come alongside them. Sit with them. Go out

for coffee with them. Invite them to dinner. Do a lot of listening. Put on thick skin and let them rant and rave about how someone at church made them angry or hurt them.

Then when they have got it all off their chest prayerfully seek to help them. Our part of the load we carry in our lives as Christians is to admit we have sinned, and to repent, to ask forgiveness and seek to change. But sometimes we need help. Sometimes in order for someone to come to terms with this load they need a brother or sister in Christ to lift what can seem like an overwhelming burden from their shoulders. They need Jesus with skin on. They need the message of hope that comes from outside of themselves. A message that come through us by our words, but also comes through a helping hand that fixes a roof, fixes a lawn mower, gives financial advice, offers to pay a bill. We can help others bear the burdens of life that have overwhelmed them by using the time, talent, and treasures that God gives to each of us. Those things that He has blessed His Church with. As we come alongside them and lift some of the weight off their shoulders, they then might be able to hear the message Jesus love that we have to share. Let them know that we still care about them because Jesus still cares about them. Ask them if you can make an appointment with the pastor. Let them know that no matter what has happened or how deep the hole is that they have slipped into it's never too deep for Jesus. He always loves and always forgives all those who believe in Him. And He grants the free gift of faith through the message about His death and resurrection in order that they might have the power to believe.

Coming alongside and helping a struggling brother in Christ is not easy. It will cost us something sacrificially: our time for certain, as well as our talents and even some of our treasures. His is what Paul is referring to in **Galatians 6:5** where he says **"For each will have to bear his own load.** Sacrificing some of ourselves is a part of the load we are to bear as followers of Jesus. It what Jesus was talking about in **Luke 9:23** **"And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."** It's the obedience to our Lord and Savior that requires a sacrifice. It may require us to come alongside those who Jesus directs into our path at a time that is not convenient but instead forces us to change our plans. It may require us to stop working on our own problems and instead help somebody with theirs. And at times God may ask us to

share from our treasure in a manner greater than what we carry around in our pocket, but in a manner that means we have to forgo some of what we desire to help others.

Bearing this kind of load is not easy. In fact, without the help of the Holy Spirit it is impossible. That's why we who are spiritual need to be immersed in the word too. We need to recognize those times and ways we fight against the Spirit's direction and call to come alongside those who are struggling. Those times when we desire to just carry on with our lives and let someone else scramble down the cliff and save someone who has fallen. When we examine ourselves and see that we are as guilty as the monk was we are to remember those words from **1 John 1:9** **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."** Having done so we hold fast to the forgiveness that is provided through Jesus sacrifice for you and for me. We remember that He willingly took upon Himself the burden of our sin and guilt that was far heavier than we could ever handle and was bound to eternally crush us. He took it and removed it from our shoulders forever. And He did it without complaining and without hesitation. He did out of love: love for you, love for me. A love far greater than what we can produce in our hearts. It must come from outside us. It comes to you when you gather here around the Word and Sacrament. It flowed into your heart in your baptism and it has not stopped flowing since. It continues to flow through the Gospel Message proclaimed by mouth and given in the bread and the wine through Christ's real presence. It's His gift of love that refreshes and strengthens you. And it's what we have to share with others when we share the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ-who died for our sin and rose again so that we might have the promise of everlasting life.

It is the power that can change the lives of those who are slipping away from faith. It is the power that can move us to come alongside them and share love and faith with them. And we need that power because the work of restoration in many instances is not done in a day. Paul describes it as a continuing process and work. Sometimes it requires repeated effort to lift someone out of the hole they've fallen into. Sometimes it requires patience and grace as they, once out, slide back down again. Just as Christ is patient and forgiving with us, so too we are called to be the same in the lives of others. From Him alone we receive the strength

to shoulder the burdens of others. He also provides the strength for you to **(Galatians 6:1b) “Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted”** as you come alongside those that are struggling. To watch ourselves so that we do not fall into the same sin or a similar one. To watch that we do not become prideful, so that the help we offer is not with the attitude of who is a more mature Christian and a better Christian, instead of one who is a sinner just like they are, yet lives in the love and forgiveness of Christ.

Sadhu Sundar stood there looking down at the man below him crying out for help. Then he turned to the monk and said, “God has sent me here to help my brother. I cannot abandon him.” The monk responded, “Then you will both die on this mountain” and trudged off. Sundar carefully climbed down the embankment to the man. His leg was broken and he could not stand. So Sundar made a sling using his blanket and tied the man’s body to his back. He then began the laborious climb back up to the path. By the time he reached it he was drenched with sweat. He made his way slowly and carefully down the path, through the coming darkness and bitter cold, sweating profusely as he carried his burden. When he began to feel weary and faint, he prayed. And then as he rounded a bend he saw the lights of the monastery ahead. With renewed vigor he quickened his pace, but then tripped and fell. He looked back to see what he had tripped over and in the light from the monastery saw that it was the frozen body of the monk who had left them behind. Years later when one of his students asked him “What is life’s most difficult task?” Sundar responded, “To have no burden to carry”.

That’s how Sundar’s story ends. How will the story of Steve and Jim end? That ending hasn’t been written yet. It awaits to be played out in your life and in mine. But Jesus knows. He knows who are the ‘Steve’s’ in our life. And just as with Jim, He wants to send you and I to come alongside them. To come and help them bear the burdens that are too heavy. To come alongside and be His tool to faith in them. To restore them as His children who are forgiven for their all the times they slip into sin. To restore them to repentant faith that ends in eternal life. He gives to you and to me the tools to do so. He gives to us His love in His Word and Sacrament. He strengthens our faith and works to protect us from falling away ourselves. He is calling you to be a part of the mission of the Church. To carry the load

He gives to each of us to carry. But we never carry it alone. His Spirit helps us, strengthens us, and guides us. May he continue to do so in your life guarding your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.