

Sermon for Sunday, September 25, 2022 – Trinity XV
Galatians 6:1-10

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen.

“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load....Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” Thus far our text.

You know, there aren’t a lot of good things being done for others in the world around us. This sinful world that we live in promotes independence and self-sufficiency and teaches us to take care of “number one” (ourselves) first. Charitable organizations, such as the Salvation Army and St. Vincent de Paul, record less and less people who are willing to give of their time, talents and treasures to help those who are less fortunate. I saw a news story a while back that stated that about 25% of Americans participate in some volunteer activity on a regular basis. This was an analysis of the work that Habitat for Humanity was doing around the country. The reporter continued to say that Minnesota was where some of the most willing folks to help out live, with over 40% of people in the Twin Cities doing volunteer work. One of the lowest percentages was found in Las Vegas, with less than 15% helping out

others on a regular basis. Of course, we shouldn't be surprised at this – even the 40% means that more than half of people either don't have the time or the inclination to help others out with their struggles in life. What becomes clear is that human beings are by nature sinful and selfish creatures, and don't go out of their way to serve others. Rather, they serve themselves, and expect others to do the same.

But, in our text, Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, advocates a different attitude. He urges us to do good toward others, to be helpful in bearing others' burdens, and show the love of Christ to those within our spheres of influence. We are called to be different, to be beacons of light in a world where darkness and sin has become the norm. Now, we don't take credit for this different, Christ-like attitude – it is totally the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts that causes us to be selfless and giving and loving toward others. But the fact remains that those who are turned completely inward, and don't give back to others, are headed toward a dead end of corruption and evil, brought about by selfishness and a lack of concern for the plight of others. Let's take a look at Paul's exhortations here and see what he wants us to learn about our day-to-day living among our friends and neighbors, among other Christians, and among other people in general.

Paul states that we should not become weary in doing good, but rather should count it as a privilege when God sends those in need our way. The tasks and schedules of life can get very trying at times; it can seem as if all we are able to find time to do is to work, sleep and eat. People seem to be working more hours at their employment, and are working more varied schedules, so it seems as if there is no end in sight to the "daily grind." In family situations, often parents and children are literally running from one activity to another, trying to find time to rest and take a breather whenever they are able. As a result of the original sin

of Adam and Eve, the work that we have to do in this life is no longer easy for us; rather, it has become a burden, and various weeds and snags crop up to slow down our productivity and our progress.

But God intervenes in our individual lives, and gives us the strength to do His will, and to help others with their struggles and troubles. He reminds us in the Gospel reading for this morning that we should not worry about what we will eat, or what we will wear, or where we will live, because He takes care of us. God takes care of the birds of the air and the lilies of the field; we are much more valuable in His sight than these, yet we worry about things of this world. Rather, Jesus tells us that we should seek first the things of God, and not worry so much about the things of this world. Troubles will come in this life, but the life to come is much better and much greater. We can take Jesus' promise of support and take it to the bank – when He promises something, we can be sure that it will happen.

Not only does God give us the strength to get through our daily trials and temptations, but He blesses us abundantly, and gives us extra power to help others with their struggles. Think about it – what a great example we can provide to others, and what a motivation toward service toward God and neighbor, we are able to give, if we can tell our brother, “I know what you're going through. However, I'm confident that God will see you through it, and will never leave you, and will give you the strength that you need.” It's amazing the impact that these little acts of kindness and taking time out to sympathize can make on people's lives. In a world where people don't care about others, people notice when someone is different, and take note of them. The Holy Spirit urges us to do these things, and points out the opportunities to us, and gives us the words to say and the actions to do, that are appropriate for the situation.

At the same time, however, we are not to become arrogant, or think that we are somehow better than our neighbors who are having struggles or think that we are given super-human strength by God to withstand temptation better than others. Rather, we are to keep a humble spirit, and realize that we are just as poor and miserable sinners as anyone else, except possibly worse. The old phrase, “By the grace of God go I,” reminds us of the fact that without the grace and mercy of God in Christ Jesus, we would all be destroyed because of our sinfulness – no exceptions! We need to bear in mind that we have all missed opportunities to help others out when we could have, and have dismissed being helpful out of selfishness, greed, or other greatly sinful attitudes.

While we are helping others out, it is good for us to keep in mind that we, too, have burdens to bear. Paul uses different language here to describe the different burdens that are borne. When he talks about the burdens of others, he uses a Greek term that refers to a load that is so heavy to bear, that a team of oxen would be straining at their reins to pull it. One never knows when this type of burden will completely sap the strength of the one that is carrying it. However, when he talks about the burdens that we bear, he uses a Greek term that approximates the rationed pack that military soldiers carry while marching, which, while difficult to carry, is ultimately manageable. Why does Paul use these different terms? To remind us that while our particular thorns in life are difficult, the burdens that others live with every day are most likely more difficult than our own. We don’t understand the lives of others. We don’t know what people are going through in their daily lives. We should err on the side of love and grace and assume that others need help getting through the daily grind, even though we are able to handle what life throws at us. It is an attitude of self-sacrifice and love toward our neighbor that characterizes the lives of believers in Christ.

Before we start thinking that Paul is merely giving us a list of demands from God that we must keep, we ought to keep on reading from Galatians, a couple of verses later. Paul reminds us that we should never boast except in Christ and His merits on the cross of Calvary. This also fits with our Gospel reading for this morning, where Jesus tells us that we should seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. This serves as a two-fold reminder to us. First of all, that Christ has borne our burdens, and become our Savior, and has taken the sins of the world upon His ample shoulders when He died and rose again on the cross. No one else could have done it, but He did it out of His love for us. Because He died and rose again, we have the forgiveness of our sins, and things are made right once again between us and God. We are freed from the yoke that is too heavy for us to bear (our sinfulness) and are given a yoke that He gives us the strength to carry (love toward God and our neighbor). There is hope! Our help is in the Name of the Lord, Who made heaven and earth. (You might remember this from the liturgy in the old hymnal – Divine Service III in LSB). He is all-powerful, yet He cares for us.

Secondly, when we start bragging, and thinking that we are better than others because we are helpful and giving of our time and possessions, we are reminded that it is Christ's merits alone that count for our salvation; indeed, that give us the urging to do whatever good we do in the first place. Without Christ's sacrifice, and the Holy Spirit's implanting of faith in Him in our hearts, there would be nothing good whatsoever proceeding from us. Our lives would be completely caught up in selfish behaviors, and sinful hoarding of our resources. But, because we have been shown love from God, He enables us to reflect it to others, by His power and His impetus and urging. We can boast in Christ, and His merits, because they are perfect, just as He is perfect.

Also, Paul reminds us that a tally won't be kept of our good works versus our evil works; rather, what gets us into heaven is the merits of Christ, and God's love for us that knows no bounds. You see, the Pharisees and Sadducees in Jesus' day thought that if they could just keep all of the Laws of God found in the Old Testament, then they would be included in the promise of heaven. That's why they included so many prohibitions and prescriptions for behavior that covered virtually every situation that could arise in society. If it was codified, and people obeyed the laws, then God would be appeased. There's two problems with this theory. First, we cannot keep the laws perfectly for one day, much less our entire lives. Second, even if we could keep them, our desire to sin, the sinful nature within us, would condemn us even if we didn't commit one outward sin all of our entire lives.

When we get to studying our lives, which Paul urges us to do, we will find that we don't measure up to even one part of God's righteous ideal. This can lead us down into despair and depress us to the point of becoming despondent. This can become another burden to us, one which can paralyze us, and make us unable to serve others. But we can take comfort in the fact that, even though we don't measure up to God's standards, He changes us, and gradually makes us into the image that He wants us to have, by His power and His love. He gives us the hope of being in heavenly glory with Him when our earthly lives are over, as a promise for the future that is as sure as being ours right now, because God never breaks His promises. We know that we don't keep God's laws, but Jesus did, and His perfect obedience and life are counted in our stead, and give us the reward that we don't deserve.

The new creation, the new heaven and the new earth, is coming soon. Once God takes us to heaven to be with Him, there won't be any burdens to be borne anymore, much less to help others to bear in their own lives. The way to this new creation was paved by Christ, our

crucified and risen Savior. Because of the sinful nature that clings to us like glue, we don't want to help out our families, friends and neighbors – we would rather focus on our own problems, and let others deal with their own issues. But, Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, urges us to a different way. He urges us to help one another with our various struggles in life, thereby reflecting God's love to them, and doing the will of the One that removed each of our thorns from our sides by His perfect life, death, and resurrection. By doing this, people will notice that we are different, and start asking questions about what motivates us to be different. This will open the floor of discussion for us to share the reason for the hope that lies within us, and the fountain for the love that overflows out of us toward our neighbors who are in need. This reflection will not be perfect in this life, because of the sinful nature that clings to us like glue. But we are promised that the Holy Spirit will gradually bring out these good works from within us, and will steadily make us more and more into the image that God wants us to have, until it is perfected when He takes us to Himself in heaven. It all comes back to the summary of the commandments that Jesus gives in the Gospels – love toward God, love toward our neighbor. This is His will in this world, and He empowers us to fulfill it day by day, by His power, and His urging and His love shown toward us, giving us the hope that cannot be quenched – the hope of life eternal in heaven before the unveiled face of our heavenly Father. Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.