

“BEARING BURDENS—OTHERS’ AND OUR OWN”

Galatians 6:1-10, 14-18, Proper 9-C

July 3, 2016

I am not really a big fan of Country-Western music but two times in the past two weeks, two different participants in two different Bible studies I was leading here at church, brought to the class’s attention a song that was made popular in 1980 by that Country Music Legend -- Mac Davis. Many of you will immediately recognize the words to this song: “O Lord, it’s hard to be humble when you’re perfect in every way. I can’t wait to look in the mirror, I get better looking each day! To know me is to love me, I must be a really great man! O Lord it’s hard to be humble, but I’m doing the best that I can!”

Lord, it is hard to be humble, isn’t it? Especially during those times **when we are experiencing a high degree of success in life. It’s hard to be humble, when we find ourselves riding on the crest of that big and powerful wave in life—leading us to our hoped-for destination. Suddenly all those hours of hard work and faithful dedication to what may have seemed to be, at times—a totally insurmountable task, may nevertheless, by the grace of God, finally paying off!**

Lord, it is hard to be humble, isn’t it? **People in the ancient world used to tell of the fly who landed on the ear of the horse pulling a general’s chariot. Looking back at where they’d been, the fly was pleased to think to himself, "My, we raising a lot of dust, aren’t we?"**

In the Far East, still today, they talk about the ant who rode on the back of an elephant as it passed over a hanging bridge. When they had reached the other side, the ant shouted into the elephant’s ear: "My friend, we sure made that old bridge shake something fiercely, didn’t we!?"

And of course, it wasn’t so many years ago that someone told me about **the woodpecker who was pounding away on the trunk of a dead tree when lightning struck. Flying away, the woodpecker thought out loud, "My, look at what I’ve done." Lord, it’s hard to be humble when you’re perfect in every way.**

The Bible however tells us—that assuming such a braggadocios approach towards life can eventually lead us unfortunately, however, to our own great demise. In **Proverbs 16:18** we read: *“Pride goes before a fall!”* And this cold, hard fact of life is also shared with us in other places throughout the Bible. Even Jesus concludes one of his parables one day by saying: *“They who humble themselves will be exalted and those who exalt themselves shall be humbled” (Luke 14:11).*

1. And so doesn’t all of this signal for us the kind of big and dramatic change that eventually came one day over the Apostles Paul’s life? What a different there was in this man’s life previous to and then later following his great conversion!

There were times in his previous life, of course, his life BC – Before Christ – when he must have enjoyed reveling in his own great spiritual pedigree.

Yes, there were even times after his conversion; that he would remind certain people of his great spiritual credentials that used to fill him with so much pride and self-congratulations!

In **Philippians 3:4-11**, Paul writes: *“If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, under the law blameless! But whatever gain I had, I count as loss for the sake of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord and being found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that is based on the law but that which comes from God and depends on faith. That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, becoming like him in his death, so that I might also attain the resurrection of the dead” (Philippians 3:4-11).*

This man whose life was totally changed from the inside out by the life-saving Gospel of Jesus Christ also confesses his faith when we hear him say to us today in **verse 14**: *“Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world!”*

But unfortunately being proud and haughty while we are looking “spiritually” down our noses at other people—**will never do anything to contribute to the vital health of any Christian congregation!** Why not? Because even the best of people—**sometimes “slip up.”** Listen to what Paul is saying here again: *“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!”*

Paul knew the problems that may not only arise in every Christian congregation but also within the framework of a larger Christian society. The best of men “slip up.” The word Paul uses here does not mean that a person has set out hurt or to harm another person with the malicious intent to ruin the life of another person. The Greek word Paul uses here is *paraptoma* that does not necessarily mean a **deliberate sin; but a slip up—kind of like a man who slips and falls on an icy road or on a dangerous path.**

But the danger posed unknowingly by those who are often extremely committed to living a truly “Christian” life is that they may also become far too quick in judging the lives of other people far too harshly!

There is an element of “hardness” at work in all of us from time to time! Because of this, there are **many good people to whom you could never go and sob out a story of personal failure and defeat because, quite frankly, they would be totally unsympathetic.** But Paul is saying that if a fellow believer does somehow slip up, or fall, the most-blessed Christian is that Christian who only wants to help such persons to get up on their feet again!

Why is that someone who can be so compassionate towards others when they are physically wounded, has so little compassion towards those who have suffered a spiritual injury? For example, what would you do if you were driving home from this worship service today and suddenly saw someone lying alongside of the street injured and bleeding? I imagine that most every one of you would pull your car off to the side of the road and punch in 9-1-1 for help on your cell phone! You would probably call for an ambulance first and then call for the police, and then you would do everything you could to help that poor victim in any way. It’s natural for us to respond to the physical needs of people in distress, but what would we do if we found someone spiritually wounded and bleeding and we could easily discern that their soul is now in danger?

Rather than our only assuming a posture of pride and arrogance towards another person whose sin has become public knowledge throughout a Christian congregation, Paul is advocating that we take a totally different posture here. Paul indicates that our posture towards other believers who fall into any type of sin should always be one of **compassion**. It’s the kind of compassion that leads us to say: *“But by the grace of God, there go I!”*

In the words of our epistle lesson this morning, St. Paul is speaking to us about our need to help shoulder or to bear one another’s burdens by exercising toward that other person a merciful spirit rather than one only of condemnation. Still there are always those who allow their pride to get the best of them, who rather than saying: *“By the grace of God there go I”* they choose to say instead: *“Nothing like that could ever happen to me or in my family!”*

Such persons are conceited even as they look scornfully at others! It’s these types of people that Paul brings to our attention next when he says: *“For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he*

deceives himself" (v. 3)! "Let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each must carry his own load!" (v. 5)

2. And initially, it may seem, as if St. Paul here is contradicting himself. For in verse 2 Paul writes: "Bear one another's burden," and then in verse 5 he says, "Each one must bear his own burden!"

So which is it? Will the real Apostle Paul please stand up? For here in verse 2 Paul says, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ! And then in verse 5 he says, "Each one must bear his own burden?" **So which is it? Are we to bear one another's burdens or are we simply to bear our own burden? And the answer to both of these questions is: YES!**

This is how the Greek text is translated in King James Version of the Bible (KJV) that I grew up on: "Each one must bear his own burden!" Here the translation of the Greek in the English Standard Version (ESV) is a little different, where Paul says: "**Each one will have to bear his own load!**"

To prevent any of us from falling into any type of sin carelessly, God has created the Church.

And God has even called some people to become full-time, professional workers in the church. In Ephesians 4 Paul writes that God has called some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be pastors and teachers and others to be the evangelists of God's Word!

"One who is taught the Word must share all good things with the one who teaches" (v. 6)! And the one who teaches is supposed to constantly be planting the seeds of God's Word into other peoples' hearts and minds. A pastor may spend a lot of time studying the Word of God, praying about that Word of God, in the hopes of genuinely feeding other people on the Word of God, but if the disciples of Jesus lose their love for God's Word and fail to realize that their souls must be continuously fed by the grace of God—through the preaching of the Gospel—and the faithful administration of those two great sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, the preacher's diligent work in preparing to strengthen the faith of other people could all easily come to naught!

How are you spending your time? "For the one who sows to the flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life" (v. 8). One of the best ways to prevent oneself from sinning—is by faithfully ministering to others in Jesus' name! This is the point that St. Paul is trying to drive home to us when he continues: "And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up! So then as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith!"

3. So my brothers and sisters, St. Paul brings our epistle lesson this morning to a wonderful close with a most stirring statement!

St. Paul says that he will **boast only in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ**. And the cross of Christ for St. Paul certainly **meant much more than the mere wooden beams to which the body of Jesus was nailed!** The cross of Jesus stands for the whole redemptive work of Jesus by which he earned forgiveness and eternal life for us by his suffering and death. The cross meant blood, suffering, anguish and abandonment for the Son of God by his Heavenly Father. It was a cruel, shameful, frightfully painful lingering death. "**Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which I am crucified to the world and the world to me!**"

The cross of Christ was not a beautiful gilded emblem, adorned with precious stones, attached to a chain to be worn around the neck. **It was not an object of admiration but a symbol of shameful death, like the gas chamber, the electric chair, the gallows, the guillotine, or a needle filled with deadly poison. It was a tool of execution.**

The cross should always remind that us that the Holy, Innocent Son of God *“was put to death for our transgressions and raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:25)!* St. Paul says that through the cross the world has become crucified to him, and he to the world. Where can we find freedom from a life that would otherwise be lived out in this world totally dominated by sin! Paul says at the cross! *“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God!” (1 Corinthians 1:18)* AMEN