

Sine Domino Frustra Laboramus

6th Sunday after Pentecost
July 4 2010
Glendale Lutheran Church

YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW
Galatians 6:1-10

I.

Since it is Independence Day weekend, and many flags are flying, both here at church and at our individual homes, and since there are many references to our nation in our liturgy, I suppose it would have been prudent for this sermon to have been focused on our nation as well. But, except for special services, like the one we had on the evening of “9-11,” I’ve never been comfortable doing that, mainly, because either it would become platitudes or dangerously close to political suggestions which would become misconstrued depending on where you are in our political spectrum; neither is worth time and words from a Christian pulpit. You are as astute and well-read as I am about our nation; we all have our perspectives about what is right and wrong about our nation, and you don’t need to hear that from a pulpit.

But I will talk about the church from this pulpit; it’s something I know something about. And I know that life in and as the Church, a local congregation of believers, is dynamic, not static; it is an ongoing process of nurture and growth, not set-in-your-ways stagnancy. When we ‘sign up’ to be part of the church (or, more accurately for most of us, when we WERE signed up at the occasion of our baptism) we make a commitment or two. Primarily, of course, we make a commitment to grow and be nurtured

individually as a child of God, to study and learn and witness and serve and worship and support the church's ministry with gifts as God's has bless you. Faith and faithfulness is very personal, as is our eternal salvation. The God of grace and glory doesn't invite groups of people into the heavenly kingdom, but individuals, one by precious one. We shall not enter eternal glory on the coattails of our believing parents or spouse or even child, in some cases, but solely through the love and mercy of the Christ who knows each of us by name, and calls us his own precious children.

But when we 'sign up' to be part of the church, we also make a commitment to regard one another as a sister or brother in Christ; spiritually, we become part of a family, with all of the rights and responsibilities therein. At its best, a church family has a genuine regard for one another, showing care and concern and compassion. That's the genius of the Church catholic and I, for one, cannot imagine my life apart from such a fellowship.

II.

That's the context for our second lesson, Paul's concluding chapter to the church at Galatia. Actually, there were some among them who had become seduced by a different 'gospel,' and were thus losing their focus on Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. That was the 'sin' to which Paul refers in the opening verse of our lesson. But just as important as it was to expose the fallacy of that false doctrine, equally as important was the spirit in which the erring person should be confronted: "You who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. 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.” That’s pretty heavy stuff.

Throughout my years of ministry – 40 now! – the times have been rare that contentious individuals or a group have sought to bring discord and disunity among the three congregations I have served as pastor. Thanks to God for that, and for you. For better or worse (usually worse) those occasions were never about theology, or the heart and core of our confession of faith (although, truth be told, it was a matter of losing our focus on Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and, instead, becoming preoccupied with personalities or peripheral stuff.)

My thought, rather, drift toward those among our church family who slowly but surely who have done just that – they have drifted apart from us, sometimes because of hurt feelings, sometimes due to benign neglect, sometimes just because...

Such individuals are not just statistics on a membership directory; they are individuals who are – or were, at one time – part of us, and to whom we have made a commitment to prayer and care toward them.

Does someone specifically come to mind, even now? Someone whom you have missed here? Someone who has seemingly left the church through the proverbial ‘back door’ and, to your knowledge, has just stopped worshipping with any fellowship of believers? That – no, they – concern me, and concern me greatly. And I invite ‘you who are spiritual’ (using Paul’s language) to join with me in seeking to ‘restore them gently,’ to carry with them their burden of life apart from the fellowship of Christ’s family in a spirit of love and concern.

Why? Not that our church might ‘look good’ – that is a huge temptation – but because we simply care about their personal relationship with Christ, and

the weekly, if not daily, growth of that relationship through contact with Word and Sacraments – and because we know the temporal and eternal benefits of life as the Church. Pray for them – lift them up daily and diligently, and seek the Spirit’s guidance on how best to reach out to them. Then, as the Spirit compels you, do just that. Reach out to them, personally, and without judgment or hidden agenda. You don’t need my ‘permission’ (God forbid!) but you have my prayers and wholehearted support and God-speed. And I include in that those adult children here who are not here – talk with their mom or dad and see inquire of them, and tell them to tell their child that are being prayed for. Or, better yet, find out their address or email, and tell them yourself. I’d be willing to bet that there’s not a parent here who wouldn’t be grateful for that show of interest in the person they love. Jesus’ words in the Gospel lesson to the seventy-two sent out on a ‘trial run’ have always bothered me (loosely paraphrased) “Those who don’t welcome you, shake the dust off your feet and go elsewhere.” I’ve never quite known when that time must come. Yet I know that I’ve done that, and probably will, which brings pain to my heart and with the resolve that my intentions are never, ever to ‘clean up our membership role.’ My only consolation comes from the assurance that, if from a human perspective, I feel that my efforts have gone for naught, God never gives up on anyone. And maybe, just maybe, if nothing else, by the Spirit of God within me, I have sown the seed of God’s love through Christ and our humble concern that their faith in that Christ be rekindled and nurtured. That continues to be my task as pastor, and it is your task as well, for together we are church.

III.

YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW. “The one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” The Church is not about me, or you; the church is about US And the church is about extending our mission and ministry to reach out to others with the love of Jesus. It is not about distinguishing between the spiritually mature and the spiritually weak; it is about a humble, grateful recognition that we are ONE, united at the foot of the cross and open tomb. There is no room for pride in the church family, no room for comparing ourselves with someone else in a self-aggrandizing sort of way. There is room only for acceptance and grace, for both those-for-whom-it-is-easy-to-enter-these-doors as well as for the disenfranchised who have become separated from us, ‘just because...’ One by one; each one special, each one loved by God. We often hear that ‘the harvest is plentiful,’ and amazingly and ironically, the potential ‘harvest’ is right here. Imagine, just imagine: seeing that someone with whom you took the time and prayer and energy to touch with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and with your own, Christ-centered love, greet you here or even in heaven, and say to you, “Dear sister, dear brother, thanks for praying for me, thanks for caring about me; I’m living evidence that YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW.”

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.