

Sermon 1614

Galatians 6.1-10

October 8, 2017

What option do we have?

Can we go off the grid so no news ever reaches us? Can we crawl under a rock and hide out the rest of our lives?

What option do we have?

Can we so restrict our circle of friends and acquaintances that we will never, ever hear about the misfortune of someone who is close to us? Can we wall off the emotions of our heart so the only feeling we have is relief that it wasn't us?

What option do we have?

For you, for me, there are no options. As God's chosen people, knit together by his holy plan, there is only

The Burden of Love

1. There are loads to carry (1-5).
2. A harvest is coming (7-9).
3. Do good to all (10).

“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted (1).”

There is sin in the world. Lots of sin. That's why we are in church today. Sin is a tragedy that has marked the halls of our life since Adam and Eve's first sin, that original rebellion against God. If there were no fall into sin, there would be no suffering in this world. Wouldn't that have been nice? But we foolish Lutherans are ruthless realists, not hypothetical thinkers. Sin is here. We have no option but to deal with it. We have no option but to deal with our sin and the sin of others.

“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 (2-5).”

One of the loads we carry is our own sin. It shows even when we try to help others, Test our own actions, Paul says, keep a close eye on yourself, lest we get on our high horse and get carried away. So even at our best, in our bright and shining moments, have this sinful human nature within us. And when those bright and shining moments pass, each of us is capable of untold cruelty and harm. Christian grief for suffering in the lives of others is always coupled with repentance over our own sin which has brought suffering into this world.

How do we get rid of that sin? We've got the inescapable image of Jesus on the cross in front of our church. Jesus took the burden of our sin upon himself when he hung on the cross. He took that burden off our shoulders so we never have to carry it again. We are forgiven. Our trust in that forgiveness makes us walk humbly before God and man. We have a great and different burden to carry. The burden to love the Lord with thankful hearts and to love our neighbor as ourselves. When we

carry that burden, our individual “load,” then we can shoulder the burden, the sins of others.

The sins of others cause suffering as surely as our sins cause suffering. What option do we have but to confront that suffering and fight against the consequences of the sins of others?

“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; 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 (7-9).”

The burden of love demands that we take a sober view of the outcomes of life. There will be only two outcomes of life, two very different outcomes. The one, destruction. Those who pursue their own selfish interests, their destructive fantasies, those who cut themselves off from whatever is pure, whatever is noble, whatever is charming, they will reap a harvest of destruction. My wife commented on the tiny man with a lot of guns, as to his eternal destination, far from the halls of the saved. “I don’t see how it can be anything other than that,” I said. A life that destroys life, a life focused on taking life, a life that is thrown away by one’s own hands, that is the definition of godlessness and despair. That is where any life led without God will end up, must end up. So many things in life promise blessings, promise to unite us, to free us, to give us a reason for living. But each and every one of those promises, apart from God, leaves broken bodies, disappointment and a dead end.

How different the life led for God! To many it seems the most foolish of lives. The payoff is so far down the road, yet it is the only choice that leads to eternal life. Paul says this life is focused on the Spirit. Those who live this life choose to please the Holy Spirit. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Those who seek and display these virtues in their lives are on the right path, the path that leads to eternal life.

The harvest comes only once a year, at the end of the growing season, at the end of months of backbreaking toil and unremitting labor. Don’t grow weary, Paul writes. Don’t give up. Look to the harvest. Look to what is coming.

We have entered into this hard way of life because of the burden of love. The Holy Spirit has created that faith, that trust in our hearts. We trust Jesus took the burden of sin off our shoulder, so we want to live for Jesus. We want to imitate his life in our words and actions. It is as plain as the nose on your face that we are little Christs, walking in his footsteps, imitating his life, doing what he did, speaking as he spoke. It’s just the way it is. We have no other option, nor do we desire one.

The burden of love is finally this, to do good to all.

“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (10).”

I cannot tell you why the events of last Sunday night transpired. No one on earth can fully explain it, though they engage themselves fully in the details. Investigators and experts will have some reasoned idea as to what went on. Those who simply natter will have a lot more guesses much sooner all espousing their own points of view. And, because we are transfixed by what is unusual, what is out of the norm, many will focus on one tiny man with a lot of guns.

That is unfortunate, because a different story unfolded as the hours and days went by. In a town where you get honked at if you wait three seconds after the light turns green, people waited in line to give blood for up to eight hours. People jacked pickups to use them as ambulances to ferry the wounded to trauma centers. Police provided high speed escort! Strangers stayed in harm's way to get others out of danger. Off-duty first responders and soldiers retired or on leave acted like they were in the heat of battle. Doctors with but two hours sleep threw themselves back into the hundred operating rooms which were going non-stop in the valley. People showed up to feed the displaced and the first-responders. Funds were raised to help with medical costs. The papers were filled with the faces of those who left this world and those who will go on to enjoy God's gift of earthly life.

No questions were asked. No judgments were made. People were in need and they were helped. People were hurt and they were helped. Last Sunday night did not cause a wave of unmitigated disasters. After the night, the dawn. After the fear, the hope.

But I am preaching to the choir, aren't I? Ever since that day you have been following the stories, praying for the wounded and for those others left behind. Ever since that day, you were looking for ways to help, going down to the Thomas and Mack Center to hand out food to those waiting to go elsewhere, feeding the first responders so they could quickly get back to their work. Ever since that day, you have held up holy hands for the healing of bodies and souls, praying that lives be spared, offering thanks for a system that worked and worked well for the saving of many lives. And you didn't care what color their skin was, what their marital status or gender was, what their religious or political affiliation was. People were in need and they were helped. People were hurt and they were helped. That's

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But what option do we have? To show love and receive love, to help and be helped, to be forgiven and to forgive, that is our breath, that is our meat and drink. It is a life of faith in action, a spirit that is willing to bear the burden of love.