

“Carrying Our Load”

Galatians 6:1-7, 9-10

My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression,
you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one
in a spirit of gentleness.

Take care that you yourselves are not tempted.

Bear one another's burdens,
and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

For if those who are nothing think they are something,
they deceive themselves.

All must test their own work;
then that work, rather than their neighbor's work,
will become a cause for pride.

For all must carry their own loads.

Those who are taught the word
must share in all good things with their teacher.

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked,
for you reap whatever you sow.

So let us not grow weary in doing what is right,
for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.

So then, whenever we have an opportunity,
let us work for the good of all,
and especially for those of the family of faith.

Carrying Our Load

Galatians 6:1-7, 9-10

July 6, 2024

Rev. Michael P. Catanzaro

I.

This morning, and over the course of the next two months, we will be carrying on the tradition of a grand old experiment. I read to you from the Sesquicentennial book, compiled in 1957, to retell the history of the Canton First Presbyterian Church on the occasion of the 150 year anniversary of its founding:

After the turn of the century a great concern arose for the churches in smaller communities or open country, in the area surrounding Canton. This is interesting for the church has maintained this concern down to the present day. It is probably just as well that we do not know all the facts of this work down through the past fifty years, for it has been in many ways a most discouraging venture. Give the church credit then, for this concern still marks the congregation and hope still continues to prompt us to strive together with these churches to secure a continuing and responsible ministry.

II.

Many years ago, now (20 years to be precise) the folks at Brick Chapel and the Session of the Canton Church began to hatch a plan for me to preach at both services over the summer, with all of us seeing this as a good way to meet a wide variety of needs. For the folks at Brick Chapel I, along with Pastor Donna Doig, would provide consistent, and on occasion, perhaps even inspiring leadership in the pulpit. We recognized, however, that in many ways the shoes of Rev. Bill Mundell, who served the Brick Chapel Church, so well for so long, could never be filled. For the Canton church, this arrangement allowed for a way to maintain the connection with our members who call Brick Chapel their church home in the summer. Meaning Rev. Mike could make sure they really *were* attending out at Brick Chapel as they claimed.

III.

For myself, it appeared on the surface to be a good way to supplement my income in order to provide for my young family; and, a means by which to strengthen my ties to the folks out at Brick Chapel who may not realize that

the Canton Church worships *all year long*...even after the season at BC has ended!!! However, the truth is, what I've just told you is all a lie, smoke and mirrors to hide the real reason I will again be preaching this summer at both the Canton and Brick Chapel Churches.

In the summer of 1912, the then new minister of the Canton Church, Rev. Curtain R. Roop, did a rather exhaustive study of the situation in the rural churches at Pyrites, Beech Plains and Brick Chapel; what had been designated in 1910 by the St. Lawrence Presbytery as the Canton Rural Mission Field. He then gave a rather interesting and blunt report to the Session of the Canton Church.

IV.

Rev. Roop said, "*In order to arouse sufficient concern to help these churches grow, some means of providing a continuing ministry would have to be found.*" He then matter of factly stated, "*The occasional sending out of a minister or other representatives of the Canton church would accomplish little of lasting value.*" The real reason I am preaching at our two churches this morning, and for the bulk of the next two months, is I believe God is calling us, both Brick Chapel and the Canton Church, to undertake something of *lasting* value. Now, this is not to say that nothing of lasting value has happened in the 113 years since Rev. Roop made his report. As we know, and on the contrary, both churches went on to do great things in the larger Canton Community, and on behalf of the Kingdom of God.

V.

Now, however, I am hearing a call for us to undertake some new thing of lasting value. *Ssh...listen, do you hear the call? No, not yet? Well, we've only just begun to listen.* Now, I know, many of you are sitting there saying, "Hey, come on, it's summer, preach me a *little* sermon, and let's just get on with the day, it's the 4th of July weekend for heaven's sake. I only need to walk out of here with a little something to nibble on, not a five course meal to chew." Well, ours is a generous God and sometimes we receive far more than we ask for, deserve, or even want. And, sometimes we forget, that God doesn't fool around. That as people who have received the Holy Spirit, as "true spirituals," we are called upon to live up to our status and fulfill the Law of Christ.

VI.

Our sermon text for today from the 6th chapter of Galatians consists of a series of four exhortations given by the Apostle Paul which spell out in practical terms what it means to “live by the spirit.” Now, I hate preaching on a laundry list of Dos and Don’ts, so I’m just going to go through them briefly, but as you hear them, I want you to recognize that each must be understood in terms of both personal and corporate responsibility.

First, if someone is entrapped or overtaken by some sin, we who are true spirituals should restore, repair and make them complete in a spirit of gentleness. Paul warns us, that we are not to be self-righteous in our attitudes; rather, we are to recognize our own vulnerability to those same failings which we seek to correct in others.

VII.

Second, we are to bear one another’s oppressive burdens. Central to our new existence “in Christ” is the concept of *mutuality*. In bear each other’s burdens we are assured that we are fulfilling the Law of Christ.

Third, conceit, that is thinking ourselves to be something when in actuality we are not, results in making us unwilling to bear the burdens of others. Humility is what allows us to bear another’s burdens, because humility allows us to admit that we ourselves have all bore the same kinds of burdens, and know first hand how difficult they are, and how much help others are to us in such situations.

VIII.

Fourth, and finally, each must carry their *own* load. One cannot expect to sow indifference or disregard for *others* and reap a community which cares for *you*. To do so mocks the justice of God, and, Paul says, do not be deceived my friends, you reap whatever you sow, for God is not mocked.

This gives us some very good guidelines for living a spirit-filled personal life:

- we are to carry our own load
- bear each other’s burdens
- treat one another with a spirit of gentleness
- act with humility
- and test our own work.

IX.

This morning, though, I would like to challenge us to apply these guidelines to our *corporate* life together. The Canton Church and Brick Chapel have enjoyed a connection together for well over a century. There is a mutual respect for the unique forms of ministry each church undertakes, and each church carries the load it is has been given. We attend each others' service, events and fundraising dinners. We care for one another in times of need, bearing each other's burdens. And, it has been my experience, thankfully, that each church treats the other with a spirit of gentleness and humility.

X.

What about testing our own work, though? Certainly each church has a gauge of its *own* effectiveness in fulfilling the Law of Christ. But, how well do we fare in a test of our work *together*? I began this sermon by stating that today we will be carrying on the tradition of a of grand experiment, a test if you will. What kind of work might we, working together, be able to accomplish? How might we become greater than the sum of our parts? How might Brick Chapel and the Canton Church build on a century-long foundation of fellowship and connection, on behalf of the Kingdom of God?

As full time pastor of one of these churches I can tell you that I have more than enough to do just to keep the Canton Church running. I know that both churches are doing their part to keep these doors open. But Paul says to us "Let us not grow weary in doing what is right for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.

So, then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith. The Brick Chapel and Canton Church is a family of faith, and we have an opportunity here folks to help each other in carrying our own load. Amen.