

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – Confirmation

June 26, 2016

Galatians 5:1, 13-26

The Holy Spirit Leads Your Way

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Dear friends in Christ, especially you confirmands:

Walk in the footprints of the soldier in front of you and you won't get killed. This is the instruction the military gives its new warriors. It is sound advice. WW 2 veterans talk about doing just that until they came to a large red pool of blood and melting snow where the footprints stopped. In Vietnam, soldiers did not fall into punji pits or trip bouncing betty mines by walking through the thick jungle in someone else's footprints.

The Apostle Paul's inspired advice to you young spiritual warriors, all you spiritual warriors, is walk in the steps of the Holy Spirit. He sets us off on our walk of faith. He leads the way. We do well to walk in his footprints so our souls do not get killed. **The Holy Spirit Leads Your Way.** His steps lead you away from sin. His steps lead you from being under the law.

All of us by nature want to blaze our own trail in life. As we mature into young adults we begin to seek more independence and self-reliance. In middle age, we strive to walk the path to success and self-reliance. In later years, we want to walk in security and self-reliance. It is that walk of self-reliance at every stage of life, to blaze a path with our steps that is the problem. By nature those steps come from our sinful nature. Those steps lead us into sinful acts.

Paul mentions those sinful acts that are at odds with the Spirit. They include sexual sins, worship of things other than God, sins that hurt others, sins that cause us to be in bad relationships with others. Those acts include the abuse of drugs and pleasure. The common denominator in all of them is this: they gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

The Spirit's steps lead away from those sins. "Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature." Live, literally, walk, by the Spirit means to follow the moving of the Spirit in our hearts as Christians. The Spirit is the strength of my life. He gives the direction for my life. It is as we learned, our sanctification. Think of the Holy Spirit as walking ahead of us putting down the footprints of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." These fruits of the Spirit stand in contrast to the sinful nature. Where the steps of the sinful nature lead to separation from the kingdom of God, the Spirit's footprints lead you away from sin to things which are not against the law.

God has set us free in holy baptism to live our lives walking in the Spirit's steps. In Christ we have crucified the sinful nature. It does not rule our hearts and minds. We are free to follow Paul's exhortation, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." To keep in step with the Spirit is to manifest those fruits he puts into our hearts. It is to put our feet into his footprints so our souls do not get killed by sin. We do so because the Holy Spirit's steps lead you away from sin. His steps also lead you away from being under the law.

Since we are in the Spirit, we follow his steps freely and willingly according to our new nature in Christ. There is no law against those things the Spirit's steps leads us into in our new life. Nor do we do them because they are commands. We do them because they are our attitude. We do them because they are right. Simply put, when we walk in the Spirit's steps we do not follow our sinful nature but God's will because that is what we now want. It is like stopping at a stop sign. We want to protect ourselves and others in love. We want to obey God's representatives, so we stop; not because we have to stop, or we will get a ticket if we do not stop and get caught.

The Spirit's steps lead us away from the law. The law cannot condemn us when we break it. Jesus has kept the law perfectly. This fulfillment of the law ended the law's ability to condemn us. To walk in the Spirit's steps means to walk in faith in Christ. When we walk in faith, we walk in Christ's righteousness; the righteousness he offered as the full payment for our sin and guilt. We inherit the kingdom of God.

So, young warriors, all you spiritual warriors, do not venture out on your own. That path leads to sin and death. "Those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." Instead, keep in step with the Spirit. Put your footprints in his. The path the Holy Spirit blazes leads away from a return to the yoke of slavery. That path leads away from being under the law.

The Spirit's path is a path in Christ, a path for Christ. God has called us into our freedom in Christ to live by the Spirit. "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."
Amen. <SDG>