

The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

July 3, 2016

Galatians 6:1-10, 14-16

We are to be Ready When Opportunity Knocks

Rev. George Ferch

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

Last week we considered what it means to keep in step with the Spirit. It means to follow the Spirit's lead and use the fruits he gives us with saving faith in Jesus Christ. As the apostle closes out his inspired letter to the Galatians, Paul offers some very concrete examples of how we do that. All these opportunities are ways we obey the law of love, love your neighbor as yourself.

The familiar personification of opportunity is it knocking on the door. When someone knocks on the door, we open it. In Paul's examples, opening the door means we do not miss whatever opportunity we have to do good to those who need it. We do that good yet like Paul we only boast in the cross of Christ.

The concluding thought in our study of the letter to the Galatians is **We are to be Ready When Opportunity Knocks**. Then, we fulfill the law of Christ. Yet we only boast in the cross of our Lord Jesus.

The first opportunity we have to fulfill the law of Christ, love you neighbor as yourself, is to rebuke sin. "If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently." Sin is like a net that snares birds, or a hidden trap that holds and tears an animal's leg. At one time or another, have not each of us been caught up in our anger, our selfishness, our lust, our ingratitude, our pride?

Then is when a fellow believer is to come gently in the Spirit's love to call the one "caught up" in sin to repentance. That is an opportunity knocking for us to act. Who would walk by a trapped bird or animal and let it remain in the trap surely to die? Jesus taught us that when someone is impenitent about a sin, we are to go and talk to that person alone to win that brother over.

Caution, however. We must be careful that as we rebuke the impenitent, we do not get caught up ourselves in the sin of self-righteousness. We must be on guard against become proud and thanking God that we are not like that sinner. We hardly can fulfill the law of Christ to love our neighbor if we think we are something, when we are nothing.

In repentance we are to follow Paul's exhortation, "Carry one another's burdens." Instead of comparing myself to others, I am to test my own actions. Then, I can judge if I am repentant for my sins. With this self-examination I can take then joy and thankfulness to the Spirit for doing what is right and not try to be righteous by comparison with others. Then instead of ignoring my neighbor's needs, I will have compassion for them and help them.

There is an interesting comparison here. I as a fellow Christian am to carry your burdens. At the same time, like each soldier must bear his own kit, or pack, each person is responsible for his or her own actions. We are to be ready when opportunity knocks; in humility and love for others, in a deep sense of our guilt and in the full trust of our forgiveness. It is only when I humbly take responsibility for myself in a God pleasing way that I truly am able to carry your burdens in my heart and love you in order to help you.

Our reaction to that love of others is to share good things with those who instruct us in God's Word. This shows our appreciation to God for the love others show us. Without them we experience the truth of Paul's reminder that God is not mocked. "The one who sows to please his sinful nature from that nature will reap destruction." Through their instruction we experience something quite different, "the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."

We may become weary in doing good. Maybe others do not appreciate our efforts, even rebel against them. Don't give up. Continue to do good to all people, especially fellow believers when opportunity knocks. We may have to wait like the farmer must wait, but the time will come when we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. We know this because God's Word promises this harvest on the basis of

the cross of Jesus. We do not boast in our own repentance, or in our actions of love toward others. We are to be ready when opportunity knocks, yet we only boast in the cross of our Lord Jesus.

Paul closes his letter by holding up Jesus' cross. Our Savior's cross is his bearing our burden of sin and guilt. By that cross, Jesus crucified, killed, our natural relationship to this sinful world. As we heard before, Jesus' cross crucified our sinful nature with its passions and desires. Nothing I do in the flesh, Paul gives the example of circumcision about which the false prophets in Galatia were making a big deal, means anything for my reconciliation with God. What counts is my new life in Christ by the Spirit.

My bearing your burden and you mine is everything in the law of love. It means nothing as the cause of my or your salvation. Opening the door when the opportunity to love knocks is the right thing to do. But it does not count for righteousness to save me. Only peace and mercy I have in my Savior's cross saves me. That is why Paul wishes those things in the certainty of the cross to all who believe. "Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God."

Paul's letter to the Galatians is about justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ. No work of love in obedience to the law contributes a single thing. Yet as a Christian, love characterizes my actions toward others, unbelievers and fellow members of the household of faith. We do good and do not grow weary in doing good because on Jesus' cross our holy Savior did for us the eternal good. Jesus did not grow weary until it was finished. In him we have the forgiveness of all our sins, new spiritual life, and an eternal life in heaven. Amen. <SDG>