

July 6, 2025

Fourth Sunday After Pentecost

“Bearing Burdens”

Luke 10:1-20

A couple weeks ago I preached about how Lutherans fear doing evangelism and why, because the Gospel of Jesus Christ is just so good, we Christians should more intentionally put our faith out there with our actions and words. I could easily double-down today with more of that based on today’s Gospel reading about the sending of the 72 and Jesus’ words about the harvest being plentiful but the workers few. But I’m just going to remind you to keep that in mind and in prayer—finding ways to give voice to your faith to benefit those who need the Gospel.

What I’m focusing on today is more the relationships we have with those who already believe, our brothers and sisters in Christ in the universal church of all believers whom St. Paul is writing to in Galatia. And he says a lot here, so I’m focusing in on just the first three verses of chapter six: *“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.”*

Faithful Christians run a big risk in the midst of a sinful world; we can start thinking we’re pretty good and those who don’t walk in the Way so well, not so much. You can see something similar happening in politics today. Left or Right, it doesn’t matter. Both sides have members who hold to this idea of a pure doctrine, call it Trumpism on one side, progressivism on the other. If you disagree with any point of the doctrine on your side, there are those who think themselves purer, who will pounce on you for your lack of correctness.

Likewise in the church. There are folks, maybe even every single one of us at some point, who look to Christ and rightly acknowledge being a poor, miserable sinner, but when they turn around and look at others of the faith, they count themselves pretty good. The simplest example of this is a weekly churchgoer noticing someone with sporadic attendance arriving Sunday morning and disdainfully considers oneself as a better Christian. The practice of worship may be better, true. But still all sinner saved only by the merits of Jesus.

And this can get much worse when another Christian commits an offense, especially a sin against you personally. Outrage! The audacity! Such a terrible Christian they are to have offended me! And I’m not saying they haven’t done wrong, but you see what our oh-so-righteous reaction is? It’s all about us. It is the self-centeredness that stems from all the way back when Adam and Eve wanted it to be all about them and not about God. It’s the fallen nature!

What should our reaction be? *“You who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.”* How crazy is that? We are sinned against but our proper, loving, Christian response is to forget about ourselves and be concerned for the sinner. But, yes, this is obviously correct. Take your eyes off the sinner and turn around and look at Jesus for a second.

You’ve been offending that guy non-stop since the day you were born. So has all of humanity before you whose sin you have inherited. He is actually, in fact, totally righteous. What is His reaction to sin? He restores us in a spirit of gentleness, love, humility and sacrifice. Yet our fallen nature wants to react to those offending us with judgment and even wrath, when their repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation should always be our goal.

*“Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”* This goes two ways. We can be tempted to join in another’s sin, of course. But the sins of pride, anger, and vengeance especially tempt us when we put ourselves above the sinners around us, especially if the wrong is against us. These feelings simply can’t abide in the same space as Christian love. *“For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.”* Before Christ we all are nothing except sinners in need of His grace. If we think otherwise, we are perilously setting ourselves in the place of the truly righteous God. We must strive to avoid this, and repent of those times we fail because we are indeed sinners in need of His grace.

I believe it is telling that in this context of someone caught in a transgression Paul writes, *“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”* What burdens is Paul talking about here? We like to think Paul is talking about people’s struggles and needs and how we should help each other out and be there for each other when times get tough. That is all true for Christians, but right here I think Paul is clearly saying that the burdens of another we are to bear is their fallenness and transgressions, even the sins that may be offenses against our own person!

We don’t particularly like this, but look around the room. It’s filled with sinners, and sinners are gonna sin! Sometimes maybe against you! Is it your job to condemn them? Certainly not. You know judgment belongs to the Lord. Your job is to fulfill the law of Christ. And while you could say the law of Christ is the whole of His teaching, I think He summed it all up nicely the evening before His arrest as recounted by St. John, *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”*

He shortly thereafter showed what such love looks like by bearing your burdens, my burden, the burden of the sin of all humanity in Himself unto the cross. Though the judge, He did not condemn. Though the righteous one of God, He did not exalt Himself over sinners, but humbled Himself to service and sacrifice for their sake. On this cross He founded His church, His assembly of the redeemed, the forgiven, who having been baptized into such love, were bound to live in it as they follow Christ into the eternal life to which He rose.

There is this popular picture of the church wherein we all behave and get along with no discord or strife. When nastiness and sin occurs, people seem shocked. If it’s an ongoing conflict many head for the hills as the congregation has ceased to be the church of Christ. Others dig in their heels, knowing they are righteous in their stance and it’s the other side that is wrong and even evil. But if you read your Bible it is quite evident this is nothing new; it’s a church full of sinners behaving badly, selfishly, self-righteously and even cowardly.

When we come to our senses by looking from our neighbor and to our Savior, our error is obvious. We’re doing a whole lot of things except what we’re called to do: loving in humble service to restore the erring, bring all to repentance with gentleness, and walk again together, forgiven by God’s grace in Christ.

Folks, it’s going to happen. Your Christian brothers and sisters are going to sin because they are sinners. You are going to sin because you are a sinner. I’m by no means saying we tolerate the sin, but our goal is not to punish it either. Our goal in love is always that of Christ; to restore the sinner to grace through the forgiveness of sins—Christ’s forgiveness and, if necessary, our own forgiveness. This is sometimes very tough, especially when you are on the receiving end of the offense. But do you really want to justify it being any other way, so that Christ would be justified in dealing with your sins differently than He has by His cross? I think not.

So, as I seem to say quite often from this pulpit; Get over yourself. Bear one another’s burdens. Don’t get offended. Don’t get outraged. Deal with the sins of another by humbly

leading them to Jesus, who takes the burdens of sin, both theirs and yours, away, and leads His church on to paradise.

Amen.