

Nov 25 – Don't Get Tired of Doing Good

Galatians 6:7-10

We now come to the conclusion of our study of Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia. In these last verses, Paul moves towards summarizing and concluding his letter. The statements in vs. 7 and 8 are bits of proverbial wisdom that point to the certainty of God's final judgement. Through them Paul, in effect, is saying to the Galatians, "Remember, this is God you are dealing with here, not some image of your own construction. Don't think you can get away with anything, for God judges everything in the end."

To understand the point that Paul is emphasizing in his concluding remarks, we have to remember that the entire last part of the letter has been a call to unity, to building up the community of faith. He says two things. Let's not get tired of doing good and let us work for the good of all...especially those in the household of faith.

I want to start with the second challenge, "Let us work for the good of all whenever we have an opportunity, and especially for those in the household of faith." First, we need to see how Paul is expanding the sphere of concern we should have beyond the walls of the church to the world at large. We are to work for the good of all. That is our first priority. Paul understands that we are going to be most concerned for those we know, whom we go to church with, but, and this is an important caveat, those inside the church are not our first or sole priority.

Have you ever wondered why I stress having you involved in the community? Why do we help sort food at the food bank? Why do we serve a community meal? Why do we hand out sack lunches to children in the summer? Why do we collect school supplies each fall? Have you ever asked yourself why? Sometimes I have had people challenge that outward focus. They want more of our energy focused internally. Most people don't even ask the question. They think this is just something a church should do. It is the right thing to be doing.

Now that we have spent all these weeks studying Galatians, do you begin to see a bigger picture? Do you begin to have a fuller and richer answer to the question of

why? It is, in part, because of the challenge of Paul to work for the good of all. It is an awareness that when one hurts all hurt. When one is lifted up all are lifted up. It is following the words of Jesus who said that we are to be a neighbor to all others, not just those like us.

Following the logic of Paul there is a rich reward that comes to the church that reaches out. It is a growth in community, in love and in unity. When you are sorting cans at the food bank, you are not thinking about politics or theological controversies. You are helping and enjoying working with others with the same goal. When next you see those you worked with you will have a new rapport. One of the amazing things that has happened because of our community dinner is the growth of community. The regulars who come, now see us as individuals who care. We are not a group that is doing stuff for them but people who know them by name, laugh with them and sometimes cry with them.

I think about one man. He started coming to the dinners. One time I saw him at the doctor's office. He greeted me and turned to his friend and said, "Let me introduce you to my pastor." At that time he had never attended a worship service, yet through the dinners, we had connected and now he felt as if he were one with all of you. Unfortunately, that trip to the doctor was the beginning of his final illness. He kept coming to dinners. He attended church a few times. I started visiting him at home and in the hospital. Finally he had to move closer to his children. We met one last time and he and his wife prayed with me and for you. They thanked God for this church who cared.

So we care for others because it is what Jesus and Paul tell us to do but we do it mostly for us. It causes us to grow in love, in compassion and unites us.

But as we know, we are at our best when we do good for those who worship with us. This is because we have come to know them, their needs, their fears and their joys. We are so good at supporting people in their challenging times. When you put down all the organizational pieces that this congregation has created for helping, it is an impressive list. We are moving to consolidating all those related to senior care under one umbrella. We are doing this so we continue to do good but also not duplicate efforts. Think about those you know who are worshipping here today. You know of

some of the struggles people are facing. I hope you ask yourself today, “Lord, what can I do?”

Now let’s get back to that first admonition. “Don’t get tired of doing good, because in time we will have a harvest.” Let’s be honest. Care fatigue is a problem. Burn out is a problem. Paul is not asking us to give and give of ourselves until we break down mentally and or physically. What is he getting at?

First, he wants us to look at the goal. What is the harvest? For Paul, in this case, it was building unity in a community that has been torn apart by challenges to their faithfulness. By continuing to care for one another, and that would mean for those who disagree with you, it would have an impact. It is hard to keep a mad going at someone you are doing something nice for. For Jesus, the harvest he wanted was nothing less than transforming the world.

So, we are called to do good. And yes, we will get tired. Sometimes, because it seems as if our caring is not accomplishing things, we will get discouraged. It is easy to begin to feel like giving up. Paul would say, keep at it. To quit is to give in and defeat is then certain. Continuing to do good means you are a candle in the darkness. Change can happen, sometimes slowly.

There are a few common sense reminders that we need to share. These are admonitions that Paul did not share in so many words but are part of his general teaching in this letter and elsewhere.

The first of these is boundaries are important. Just because we see a need doesn’t mean that we can do anything. The person might not want or accept help. Also, some people are users. They ask and ask and demand and demand and some of what they want and need is inappropriate. To help facilitates problems instead of really showing care. So keep boundaries. It is essential. We can and should not tire of doing good but we also have to do what is good for us. We need to realize that the word “no” is sometime a caring word.

Self-care is essential. You are not doing anyone any good if you are worn out. Self-care doesn't mean you don't care, it just might mean that not this time, or as much as another might want.

We can have boundaries and have self-care because doing good is a corporate exercise. When Paul talks about never tiring of doing good, his was a challenge to the entire community of faith, not to one individual. He did not want a faith community to get so concerned about their own needs that they quit caring for others. That is deadly. When an individual says no because of self-care someone else can hopefully help instead. When we have to put up boundaries the community as a whole can often strategize as to ways to help that don't enable. These helps might not work because of the individual's agenda but that is not our problem.

So as we end this series, remember. Do not quit doing good for all. Through our efforts we can transform the world in time. We can definitely help those who really need our help and we can grow in love for one another and for the world.