

Rev. Dr. David Holyan
“Outsourcing Christ’s Ministry”
First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood
Sunday, July 7, 2019

Galatians 6:7-16

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. 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.

Luke 10:1-11

See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand! It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised—only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh. May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

Let us pray. God of peace and mercy, we open our hearts, our minds, our lives to you and to the power of your spirit. And I pray that you would take the words we offer in prayer, the words we've heard read from scripture, the words that you've laid upon my heart this morning to share and whatever words we bring with us this day. Touch, bless and transform all of these words into the living word of Jesus Christ. And let that word speak to each of us as we have need. Let that word reside within us in the days and weeks ahead. And let your word be the guide and the compass of our life and our actions and what we say so that we might fill this world with your grace and that we might do your work. All of this I pray in Christ's name. Amen.

As I spent time with the reading from Galatians this week an image came to me. And it was an image of Rob gathering all of the work campers together at the first church that they stay at. They've spent the night. They're now getting ready to go in-- after breakfast, they go in and make their lunches. And they're getting ready to go to do the work. And I could imagine him saying to them something of what Paul says to the Galatians, that after a long trip and maybe a rough night of sleep, possibly a little bit of grumbling here and there he says, "So let us not grown 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 [inaudible] the family of faith." And it seems to me that that message to the work campers is a message that we as Christians say, "Yes. That is exactly what the Bible teaches us to do, to love our neighbors as ourselves, to love God, to do good, to keep doing good." And when the situation is difficult, or we're feeling tired or weary we want to just keep going because that's what Jesus and the bible tell us to do. Keep at it. Keep going. Do good no matter what. Whatever power or principality or problem that you face, just keep going.

I recently ran across a church mission statement. It was very short. And it said that the mission of the church is to change the world through the truth of God and the gospel of grace, the truth of God and the gospel of grace. Again, we would say, "Yes. That's part of what we are here to do, to change and transform a world of oppression and injustice and inequity through the truth of God and the gospel of grace." So we got to keep going, doing good, and change the world to the truth of God and the gospel of grace. Yes. Yes. Yes. But I've come to realize, in my experience, that truth of God if one of those phrases that really mean something other than what it says. What they're trying to say is we are Bible-believing people, and we adhere to the Bible. And our job is to take the truth of the Bible out into the world and to share that truth of scripture with everyone. Again, we would say, "Great. Go for it." But the question that I have and that came to me as I was thinking about this passage, and thinking about what Jesus says to the disciples in the Gospel of Luke is which part of the truth of God are we to take with us when we go out and try to change the world and offer the Gospel of Grace? Is it the message, "Just keep going. Don't give up. Do good to everyone"? Or is it a different message that we need to wrap our heads around? Because it seems that sending the work campers to Washington DC is much like Jesus sending the disciples out to all the towns that He intended to visit himself. The disciples are equipped to

do ministry. They're empowered to forgive and to cure the sick. To be with people that are hurting. To encourage them to trust the Gospel of Grace. And Jesus, because He can't be everywhere, sends the 70 out in pairs to do His work just like we are sending high school students to Washington DC to continue the mission and ministry of Christ. To do the work of Jesus that we're not doing because we're here.

And the question is what is the message that we want the high school students, or we want for ourselves when we go forth to do the work of Jesus and to carry on the ministry that he has for each of us. Because Jesus and the Gospel of Matthew says, "If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other as well. Turn the other cheek." He also says in Matthew that you are to love your enemies and to pray for your enemies. That it's easy for us to pray for our friends, but we need to pray and love our enemies as well. That kind of fits with what Paul is saying at the end of Galatians. "Keep going and do what is good to everyone." And then he says, "Well, especially to those who believe." But that's an afterthought for Paul He wants us to go forth and to do good for everyone." And if we adhere to the Gospel of Matthew, we do that. But is there a place for us to adhere to the Gospel of Luke? Are there times in our lives when rather than going forth unrelenting and loving everybody, no matter what, is not what God calls us to do? Here again, the Gospel of Luke. It first says that after this, the Lord appointed 70 others and sent them on ahead of Him. What does, "After this" mean? A couple of verses earlier, it says that Jesus and His disciples entered a Samaritan village where they were not welcome. And so He encouraged His disciples to keep on walking. To not stay to not love the people who are there. To not keep going, no matter what. But instead, He invited them to keep walking. So after that experience of being unwelcome, He says to them that I'm going to send you out. "You're going to go forth like laborers in the harvest. You're going to carry nothing with you. You're going to greet no one on the road. You're going to go to a house and say, 'Peace to this house.' And if anyone who is there who shares that peace, your peace will rest with that person." And then our Saviour and our Lord, whose truth is depicted in the Bible, says. "If that doesn't happen, your peace that you offered to that household will return to you." He also says, "Whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its street and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet, know this. The Kingdom of God has come near.'"

So are we to keep going no matter what, loving those who don't love us? Or are we at times, to make the effort, to realize that it's not welcome and to simply retreat, retracting the peace that we've offered and continuing to another place where we're welcomed? Which gospel do we trust? The one that says, "Love your enemies and pray for them," or the one that says, "If they don't accept your peace, take it back and go find a place where your peace is accepted"? Much like the dilemma that I presented the children in the children's message. Which one do you obey?

Because of the heat that's been sort in our area, and the humidity, my wife and I have found ourselves inside a little bit more than normal. And we've been watching television, and one of the things that we love watching is real life shows of people that are rescuing and helping other people. We became addicted to this British series about paramedics on a helicopter in Yorkshire flying all over, hither and yon, helping people after car accidents or hiking accidents or having heart attacks or whatever the problem was. They would fly in, jump out, run to wherever they were needed, provide assistance, get the person either back on the helicopter or on the ambulance, and away to the hospital they go. They treated everyone that they were called to treat. But unfortunately, like all shows on Amazon or Netflix, if you binge watch them, they come to an end. And so afterwards, we worked at finding a new show to watch. And I found something on Amazon called Night Watch. It is a show about the calls that come to the New Orleans Police Department, Fire Department, and Emergency Medical Service paramedics between the hours of 8:00 PM and 4:00 AM. Just imagine what happens in New Orleans between the hours of 8:00 PM and 4:00 AM. It is a wild combination between violence that is completely beyond understanding and a lot of very inebriated people who do harm to themselves and sometimes to others. If you watch more than an episode and you're kind of getting to hear these people talk, you begin to learn things about those that are working in New Orleans between the hours of 8:00 and 4:00. One of the paramedic teams is made up of two men called Titus and Dan, both of whom grew up in New Orleans and loved this city. And as the episodes go on, you realize that these people see their job as helping whoever is in need and, in a sense, building up and giving back to their city, the city that they love.

And on one of these episodes, they get a call to go to Bourbon Street because someone is bleeding uncontrollably. And so they go and they find this woman who's a lounge singer, who's had a little too much adult beverages that night. She slipped in a bar, cut her arm open pretty good, and they need to get her to the hospital because she's going to need like 17 stitches to close up her arm. They get her in the back of the ambulance. One of them sits back with her. The other one starts to drive. And then, the camera goes to them in the back. The EMT asks her, "Where are you from? You're not a native are you?" And she says, "No. I'm from New Jersey. But I love New Orleans." And then, she shows her arm and there's a tattoo that says, "If found, please return to New Orleans," right on her arm. He says he loves it. It's one of the best tattoos that he's ever seen, and then, she starts to sing for

him. All the way to the ER, she's singing. And you see bits and snippets of her singing and him kind of trying to sing. And then, after they get her to the hospital, you see the two EMTs talking. And the one in the back says, "That was one of the best trips I've ever had. She was awesome. We need to go see her when she gets better."

Later in that same show, they roll up on-- if I remember correctly, I think the person had been stabbed. It's the same thing. They show up; they jump out. They get the stretcher, go find the person, assess the situation, get them back into the ambulance. One of them's back working with the person. The other one's driving and they're headed to the emergency room. Except this time, rather than being someone jovial, they have someone combative. They get this person into the back of the ambulance; they're laying on the stretcher. They got like a seatbelt around their waist just to keep him on the stretcher. And while one of the EMTs is working in the back trying to get an IV in, the person on the stretcher reaches up and punches him in the chin. Dan, the same one who was with the singer in the back says, "I'm out." And he literally gets up and gets out of the ambulance.

A little bit later, you see him come back. They restrain this person, hands, feet, more seatbelts. And they are all business. There's no talk. There's just vitals and get the person to the ER. Done. Their mission is to help everyone, and they do. But what I learned or was reminded of is that there's a line. There's a line that we, as individuals, should not let others cross. And while we are called to love our enemies, our neighbors; while we're called to go out and share the gospel, like Jesus, and Titus and Dan, we are not called to be fools, even though in Scripture it says let us be foolish for Christ. While we are sent out of this church like the youth to carry on the mission in ministry of Jesus Christ in whatever way we feel called to do, we are not - at least if we're listening to the gospel of Luke - called to be fools for Christ in ways that demean us or God. If we are welcomed in peace, we are called to offer and remain in peace.

Although almost finished, Rev. Holyan was not able to conclude his sermon due to a medical emergency that occurred with a congregant. Please know that the congregant is doing fine and on the road to recovery.