

Weekend of Sunday, July 24, 2022
7th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 17/Year C
First Reading: Genesis 18:20-32
Second Reading: Galatians 6:1-18
Gospel Reading: Luke 11:1-13
Sermon Title: “Boasting in the Cross of Christ”

Theme

Persistence in prayer is encouraged by Jesus and wins the attention of God when Abraham intercedes for Sodom. The life of the baptized—to be rooted and built up in Christ Jesus—is to be nurtured with prayer. God hears and answers prayer and so strengthens God’s own. “When I called, you answered me; you increased my strength within me.”

Texts

First Reading: Genesis 18:20-32

²⁰Then the LORD said, “How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin! ²¹I must go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me; and if not, I will know.”

²²So the men turned from there, and went toward Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the LORD. ²³Then Abraham came near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in it? ²⁵Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” ²⁶And the LORD said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake.” ²⁷Abraham answered, “Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. ²⁸Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?” And he said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.” ²⁹Again he spoke to him, “Suppose forty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of forty I will not do it.” ³⁰Then he said, “Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak. Suppose thirty are found there.” He answered, “I will not do it, if I find thirty there.” ³¹He said, “Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it.” ³²Then he said, “Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak just once more. Suppose ten are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.”

Second Reading: Galatians 6:1-18

¹My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. ²Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. ³For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. ⁴All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their

neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. ⁵For all must carry their own loads.

⁶Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher.

⁷Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. ⁸If 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. ⁹So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. ¹⁰So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

¹¹See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand! ¹²It 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. ¹³Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh. ¹⁴May 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. ¹⁵For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!

¹⁶As for those who will follow this rule — peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

¹⁷From now on, let no one make trouble for me; for I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body.

¹⁸May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.

Gospel: Luke 11:1-13

¹[Jesus] was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.”²He said to them, “When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

³Give us each day our daily bread.

⁴And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

⁵And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ ⁷And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ ⁸I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

⁹“So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? ¹²Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? ¹³If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Sermon

And now the exciting conclusion to the six-part sermon series on the Apostle Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Right from the beginning of chapter six, the last chapter of his letter to the Galatians, Paul named a concept that I wish he would have named earlier in the letter. In verse two he wrote:

²Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the *law of Christ*.

It is unclear to me whether Paul intended the *law of Christ* to be a proper noun or a common noun. I hope he intended it to be a proper noun because if he did, it is some brilliant work. Within this passage and the next few verses, he described just what the *law of Christ* is, and he employed it as Christ's substitute for the law of Moses.

And in verse ten, he explained who the *law of Christ* applies to, and that is "the family of faith," yet another expression that I hope he intended to be a proper noun.

Obviously, the *law of Christ* only pertains to Christians, believers in Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, God's anointed and the savior of creation. Paul described Christians in verse ten as the *family of faith*. So it only makes sense that if one puts their faith in Jesus Christ, they are in the *family of faith*, and the *law of Christ* is to guide their lives.

And what specifically is the *law of Christ*? I'm so glad you asked.

The Law of Christ

- LOVE

I think love is the first bullet point of the *law of Christ*. Though it is not included in chapter six, Paul wrote about love repeatedly in chapter five, when he wrote that

^{5:6}the only thing that counts is faith working through *love*.

^{5:13}through *love* become slaves to one another.

^{5:14}the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall *love* your neighbor as yourself."

If you recall last week, we discussed that while Paul gave us the impression that one's neighbors were those within the *family of faith*, Jesus included all human beings in his definition.

^{5:22}the fruit of the Spirit is *love*, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control.

And then finally in chapter five, Paul introduced what he called the "fruit of the Spirit" and what is the first one listed? Love! Though he wrote of it more in chapter five, I am hypothesizing that among the first bullet points of the *law of Christ*, is love. Tina Turner asked, "What's love got to do with it?" Paul's response is, that it is the first and foremost bullet point of the *law of Christ*. The rest of the *law of Christ* rests on the foundation of love.

With love as the foundation of the *law of Christ*, and going back to verse one, Paul wrote,

¹My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.

The Law of Christ

- LOVE
- RESPONSIBILITY & RESTORATION

Members of the *family of faith* have a responsibility for one another. I don't think this is as applicable today as it was when Paul was trying to give shape to the *family of faith*. Furthermore, in our ever-evolving culture, norms continue to blur and Americans continue to push for individual rights.

Recently the issues of gun rights and abortion have been front-burner issues. Now it is the legitimacy of same-sex marriages. I recently watched a Netflix miniseries on the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, aka the FLDS, the infamous cult led by convicted and imprisoned child abuser and polygamist Warren Jeffs. The membership of the FLDS doesn't care what the laws of the US dictate, and no one in Colorado City, Arizona will intervene, so essentially, we in

the US allow polygamy and the arranged marriages of our minor daughters. The FLDS would ask, what business is it of yours?

But Paul would argue, that it is exactly within the responsibility of the *family faith*, and to gently restore members to compliance with the *law of Christ*.

In verse two, Paul wrote that we are

²Bear one another's burdens

The Law of Christ

- LOVE
- RESPONSIBILITY & RESTORATION
- BEAR ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

This means more than asking, "How you doing?" It means always being prepared to follow up with the burden of another member of the *family of faith*. Sometimes the only thing we can do is pray for another's burden – that's no small thing. But when another member of the *family of faith* trusts you and me enough to share their burden, we ought to be prepared to respond with real help.

The Law of Christ

- LOVE
- RESPONSIBILITY & RESTORATION
- BEAR ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS
- BEHAVE WITH HUMILITY

Paul wrote that we should behave with humility. We should not think too highly of ourselves and not too lowly of others. Here, Paul was referring to his own writing back in chapter three where he wrote,

^{3:28}There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

The Law of Christ

- LOVE
- RESPONSIBILITY & RESTORATION
- BEAR ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

- BEHAVE WITH HUMILITY
- SUPPORT ONESELF

In verses four and five, Paul wrote that each member of the *family of faith* should support themselves. And along with the virtue of supporting themselves, Paul gave us permission to take pride in the work we do. Someone once said, "I don't care if you are a ditch digger, be the best ditch digger you can be."

⁶Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher.

Here, Paul elevated the teaching ministry of the *family of faith*. Pastors, Sunday School Teachers, Bible Study Leaders, and the like should be honored for the transmission of the Good News. It is likely how you learned it! Within the local church, there is always the temptation to utilize resources in other areas that are perceived as more pressing or practical. The teaching ministry of the *family of faith* is not a luxury, it is its lifeblood.

The Law of Christ

- LOVE
- RESPONSIBILITY & RESTORATION
- BEAR ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS
- BEHAVE WITH HUMILITY
- SUPPORT ONESELF
- HONOR & SUPPORT THE TEACHING MINISTRY

So there you have it, a summary of what Paul wrote was the *law of Christ*. How are you and your church doing?

In verses seven through nine, Paul returned to his frustration with the Galatian *family of faith*. He taught them about Christ. Most of us cannot relate to the task of becoming a Christian because we were likely born into it. But in Paul's day, those in the *family of faith* were of some other religion before they turned to Christ. For them, it was a difficult transition. For those who were Jews before, there was the draw back to what they knew. For those who were devoted to some pagan god, there was the draw back to what they knew. And if we could step back from the

Christian life most of us have always known and could look at it objectively, we can understand how difficult their transition must have been.

Paul was frustrated and angry with them because he could not understand giving up freedom in Christ to return to imprisonment by the law of Moses. He reminded them that they have the Spirit within them, and he warned that separation from the Spirit will lead to their destruction. And he reminded them, as I have done throughout this series that life in the Spirit is not a *do this and get that* kind of thing – that is simply the law of Moses reworded. It's, *do this because it is the right thing to do as you live out your Life in the Spirit and trust God for eternal life*. Again, faith, not works.

Verse eleven is the beginning of the end of Paul's letter to the Galatians. It's called a postscript and it was a common practice at the time. Usually, Paul's postscripts contain greetings and good wishes to various individuals in the community, but not this time. He took the pen from the scribe and wrote the postscript in his own hand to add emphasis. His comment about how large his letters are might be similar to us receiving an email or text message in bold caps!

Paul used this postscript as one more opportunity to go below the belt, using forms of the word circumcision five times in the last seven verses. And aren't we glad? That reminds me of a story I once heard. It might be a true story.

The Emperor of Japan advertised for a new bodyguard. Three swordsmen applied: one was Japanese, one was Chinese, and one was Jewish.

To test them, the Emperor let a fly loose in the room and told them to kill it.

The Chinese swordsman swept down his blade and chopped the fly in two.

The Japanese swordsman swung his sword twice and managed to cut the fly into quarters before it hit the ground.

The Jewish swordsman chased the fly around the room, swinging his sword a few times, then sat down with the fly still buzzing around his head.

"Why have you stopped?" asked the Emperor. "The fly is still alive."

"Yes," replies the Jewish swordsman. "But now he is circumcised."

That's probably not a true story.

We have sensed his frustration and anger with the Galatian *family of faith* throughout the letter, but in his closing, he quite literally made what I think are inappropriate puns about circumcision.

¹²It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised.

Really Paul? "A good showing in the flesh"?

¹³... so that they may boast about your flesh.

He makes it sound like a locker room competition! *Oh, I see! Nice work! Who did yours?*

And lest we think Paul is only addressing men in this letter, after all, women cannot be circumcised, let me remind you of what I have reminded you of each week, and that is that circumcision was just one of the 613 decrees and laws contained within the law of Moses, but was a symbol, an emblem, an imprimatur of the whole Israelite community's acceptance of the Abrahamic Covenant with all its 613 decrees and covenants. I've encouraged you to go to Leviticus and read them all, and I assure you women, there are laws that are equally humiliating that only apply to you.

Paul finally brought it all back above the belt when he proclaimed what he believed in, and what he encouraged the Galatian *family of faith* to believe in when he wrote,

¹⁴May 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. ¹⁵For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a *new creation* is everything! ¹⁶As for those who will follow this rule — peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

That *new creation* he referred to is a concept that Paul used again in his second letter to the Corinthians, where he wrote.

2 Corinthians 5:17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a *new creation*: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

The Law of Christ

- LOVE
- RESPONSIBILITY & RESTORATION
- BEAR ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS
- BEHAVE WITH HUMILITY
- SUPPORT ONESELF
- HONOR & SUPPORT THE TEACHING MINISTRY

Brothers and sisters in Christ, not by flesh but by our adoption as children of God through faith, it may appear as though Paul's needle is stuck in a groove – that is a reference to LP's, those big black record albums I grew up with. For six chapters, he went on and on about the issues he had with the Galatian *family of faith*. Despite initially accepting the freedom of Christ, they seemed to be poised to retreat into their previous ways of living and Paul was unwilling to let them go.

There is precedence for that. In the First Reading from Genesis, Abraham wore the LORD down by his incessant bargaining with the LORD until Abraham got the mercy he sought.

And in the Gospel Reading, Jesus told a parable in which he encouraged ceaseless prayer to get God's attention for the issues that matter to the faithful.

The apostle Paul likely birthed the Galatian *family of faith* through his own selfless efforts for the sake of Christ his Lord. And out of his love for them, and more importantly, his faithfulness to the call he had received, he was unwilling to let them wander back into their previous misguided lives. Was he passionate about it? He sure was. Personally, I hope that if I ever wander, there is a Paul to draw me back.

Live lives worthy of your calling. Live out your lives of discipleship guided by Paul's *law of Christ*. Be the *family of faith* you are called to be. And trust in God for everything else.

Prayer

Merciful God, we cherish our status as your adopted children, and members of this family of faith. Inspire us to live according to the law of Christ, not for your eternal reward, but in thankful response to all you have done for us, through Christ our Lord. We pray this in his name. Amen