

Dealing With Spiritual Burnout

Galatians 6:1-10

- I. *When the work seems hard and unfruitful;*
- II. *Remember that is pleases God and brings a harvest.*

No too many weeks ago as the Summer was beginning I had many delusions of grandeur as to all of the projects I was going to get accomplished. Things here at church in preparation for the upcoming school year and the paper I will be delivering at conference this Fall. I was planning on accomplishing a number of things at my home both inside the house, in the garage and around the yard too. It seems as though I enter each Summer with somewhat the same attitude and right about this time of year, sometime shortly after the fourth of July I start panicking because the calendar is starting to fly by, school is really not too far off and I haven't accomplished much of what I set out to do. At times it seems overwhelming: you begin one project with the idea that it is going to take a certain amount of time and you find out either it leads to an additional unexpected project or it simply takes much, much longer to accomplish than originally planned.

When things begin to pile up and it seems that for every two steps forward you take you are taking one or two steps backward it can get frustrating even downright discouraging. Sometimes you may even get to the point where you want to throw your hands up in the air and state 'why bother doing anything?'

I know I can begin my sermon with this thought with you this morning because I am far from alone from feeling this way. Let's face it many of us have a lot of demands on our time and on our resources. In short we are a busy people.

Today Saint Paul reminds us that what is true for us in our day to day lives lived in the world is very much similar to what we are called to do and accomplish in our lives spiritually too. God calls each and every Christian to be the salt and the light of the world. We are that best by being involved in and active in the lives of other people. In today's text Paul encourages us to: **"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."** (verse 2). What is that law of Christ that Paul is talking about? It is none other than the command Jesus gave the night He was betrayed when He told His followers to love and serve one another. This is a rather open ended law!

We live in a world where the people who are special to us can often get into situations that is stressful or pressing and because we care about these people and we love them, their problems do become our problems too. Just

think of the things that our family and friends struggle with and that stress can easily become our stress too? How many of us, for example, know of someone who is unemployed or underemployed? How many of us know of someone who is having great financial difficulties? How about someone who is having problems with their marriage or their children? The list goes on and on. We love them and God calls us to help and serve them and that is exactly what we want to do but sometimes it seems as though no matter how much we help or advise or even fund their problems are not resolved. This can lead to burnout.

When you listen to Paul's words today do you hear how the spiritual and the day to day are so intricately intertwined? It is because our spiritual truths and our Christian walk of faith is not something lived in some ephemeral plane but rather our genuine spirituality is always concrete and real and it does make a difference in our day to day lives. Listen to what Paul says: **"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently."** (verse 1). Paul connects the "spiritual" with the concrete reality of day to day life. Here in these words of the sixth chapter of Galatians the immediate context is advising someone against sinning. Spiritual truth and life always has a revolutionary impact on the day to day life when that spirituality is genuine.

I am reminded of this line of thought by Jesus' brother James who writes in his letter: **"What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs what good is it?"** (James 2:14-17).

The problem with this is that it isn't always easy. Sometimes it isn't even a little bit easy. Sometimes someone is in financial difficulty and we help them out and it seems as though the money we gave them did little or no good. Worse yet, there are times when we can give someone money and they will use it in a way that isn't what we intended them to use it for.

There are other times when in a way that is completely faithful and appropriate we share our faith with someone and they react as though we either violated their personal space or beliefs or our witness was rejected and perhaps even seemed to do more damage than good.

There can be other times when our good works are done in private and they seem to be only an exercise in futility. Here I am thinking of the times when we pray for someone regularly. It may be praying for someone for weeks, for months, or for longer such as years and it seems as though our prayers are either unheard by God or unanswered by Him. We know that God does in fact hear our prayers and He does answer them in a way that is best

for us but it can be awfully difficult to know that and to keep on praying without fatigue.

What then do we do? When we don't keep on acting out our faith with good works then we really are not being faithful to God and we do know that and we don't want to live like that; however, when we do try we find that there are times when it doesn't seem to do any good and it either depletes our own resources or burns ourselves out.

When we listen closely to Paul's words today we do find that Paul gives us what we need to know to keep ourselves both faithful and balanced in our walk with God.

The first thing to keep in mind is that God is in control and we are not God. Remember it is God who called us to be where we are and with the people we have in our lives. God promises us that His commands are not burdensome. God does not ask us to do more than we can.

Paul says as much in today's text doesn't he? What does Paul say? **“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”** (verse 10). There are really two important lines of thought here in this sentence. The first is that Paul asks us to do good: as we have opportunity. This means that we do not have to give someone money or advice or even our time and resources beyond what is reasonable and appropriate for us to do. There are limits to what any of us can do for another. All of us can do something but very few if any of us can do everything to fix or to help a fellow person in need. This leads to the second point which is more subtle. Paul refers to the family of believers.

This is a reminder that we do not live alone but we live within a community of faith. Together we are much stronger than we are individually. We really need to rely on our strength as a community and not just as a group of people who happen to worship together at a common location.

There is something rather refreshing when we look at our lives from a different perspective. Instead of always looking ahead at how much more there is yet to do or of how quickly the time is going by we can look at what we have accomplished. In today's text Paul says: **“the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”** (verse 8). To be sure, in its most basic form what Paul is telling us is that the life lived in faith is a life that will be rewarded with life eternal. But we do not want to overlook the simple fact that as we are doing good as we are doing things to help others we are in fact reaping a harvest. Sometimes we are there to see the fruit or the reward with our own eyes. At other times we are not there to see it, but that doesn't make it any less real. We can also find comfort in the fact that God is there to see it and to bless it.