

“The Strength to Not Grow Weary” Galatians 6:1-10, 14-18

July 3, 2016

7th Sunday After Pentecost

This weekend, our nation celebrates Independence Day. For many people, this means family gatherings, cookouts, and fireworks. But what does the day mean? What *independence* are we celebrating? In our self-centered narcissistic world, many view the word, independence, as meaning “I can do whatever I want and I don’t have to consider what anyone else thinks or wants.” While this individual independence was part of the reason for the Declaration of Independence which was accepted on July 4, 1776, there was much more than that. The colonists wanted to be independent so they could form a nation and work together for the common good. With all of the emphasis on individual independence and personal freedom, this corporate independence is sometimes lost and our country suffers for it as a result.

An excessive emphasis on individual independence divides us and separates us from each other. This goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. When Eve picked the forbidden fruit and she and Adam ate of it, this action did more than break one of God’s rules. This sin separated them from God and from each other. They both became independent agents, each free to do their own thing apart from the will of God and care for one another.

That independent spirit is very much alive today. And it’s not only in the sinful world where we would expect it to be. This attitude is within the Church as well. There seems to be the feeling among many that salvation is simply a matter of “me and Jesus.” In other words, I don’t need to be here in Church on a Sunday morning because I can read the Bible and pray to Jesus at home. (And, if I don’t have time to do that or don’t want to do that, well, Jesus understands. Then it becomes all about ME.) I don’t need to do good works because, as a good Lutheran, I know that would be “works righteousness” and I’m saved by grace through faith.

When something needs to be done in the world, we will gladly wait for the government or someone else to do it while we complain that it hasn’t been done and formulate reasons why we couldn’t do anything to help. When something needs to be done in the Church, we will gladly complain that it hasn’t been done, wait for someone else to do it and, if asked to help, become indignant that we should be expected to do anything.

This fiercely independent attitude that thinks only of self is not only unhelpful and counterproductive but it is wrong and sinful. Instead of being a civil virtue, this attitude is what St. Augustine and Luther called *homo incurvatus* which means “man turned in on himself.” Sign language puts it more bluntly: “think self.”

When you are turned in on yourself, in your desires and your actions and inactions and thinking only of yourself, that becomes the basis of sin. The will of God and the needs of neighbor are shut out. What you do or don’t do becomes all about you. The evil you do, the good you fail to do, and the excuses you use to justify either of those come about because you are curved in on yourself.

We cannot be truly and completely independent. Not only does it not work, but, taken to its logical conclusion, independence leaves us separated from God. And separation from God is called “death and hell.” Jesus came into this world and into our lives so that we might be dependent upon Him and upon one another.

Jesus came to this world, not to be independent and self-serving, but to unite Himself to us and serve us. He became one of us, uniting Himself to our human nature, and becoming the God-man. He lived under the Law of God and served us by obeying the Law perfectly, as we should have done, in our place.

Jesus further served us by disengaging our sins from us and uniting them to Himself. He stood under God’s wrath in our place and took the punishment which our sins deserved by dying on the cross. He serves us with God’s full and complete forgiveness in our Baptism, in the Holy Absolution, and in the Lord’s Supper.

But there’s more. Jesus served us by taking on our last and worst enemy: death. He defeated death on the cross for us and verified that victory by Himself rising from death to life. He serves us with everlasting life because of the forgiveness for all our sins and because of His own resurrection from the dead.

Jesus has done this for all people. He has not served just good church people like you and me. Jesus has served the bad and sinful people no matter who they are. The only difference between us and them is that, by God’s grace, the Holy Spirit has worked faith in us to receive the good gifts of forgiveness and life which Jesus won for all people and intends for all people. And He did this without any merit or worthiness in us or them.

We are totally dependent on God’s goodness and mercy for all things – the things that support our physical life – food, clothing, shelter and so on; as well as the things that support our spiritual life – the Word of God and His holy Sacraments. We are also dependent on each other as conduits for God’s goodness and mercy. God does not say His Church is a group of like-minded individuals, each living for himself or herself.

The Church is like a body (the Body of Christ) with many different members (eyes, ears, hands, feet, and so on) who all perform helpful tasks that benefit all. The Church is like a building with many stones, all of which support each other and depend on each other to form the complete structure.

Our text for today shows how we live this out in real life – how we love and care for each other. First of all, remember that doing good and serving other people is difficult. Paul says, “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.” We may get tired of doing good. We’re always the ones doing good while others do little or nothing at all. Sometimes we grow weary of helping people who are not particularly nice or appreciative of our efforts. We get to the point where we want to give up and stop doing good for people.

Paul encourages not to grow weary of doing good and not to give up. Even if we don’t see any positive results and other people don’t help us and those we help don’t appreciate us, don’t give up. Our Lord sees us sowing these good actions and He will bring forth a crop which we will reap. It may be positive results in this life and, if not now, then on the Day of Judgment and the life to come when we shall hear Jesus say to us, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.... Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:34-36,40)

As Jesus has served us, so we are to serve others as if they were Jesus Himself. Paul says, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Three things are important here.

First of all, we don’t have to roam around, looking for opportunities to do good. The Holy Spirit will provide us with opportunities to do good in our families, our schools, our places of employment, our church, and our communities. Pray that the Spirit will open your eyes to see the opportunities He places before you to do good and the desire and skill to do that which is needed.

Secondly, we do not discriminate over who we serve and for whom we do good. We are to do good to EVERYONE – Christian and non-Christian people; good and bad people; nice and annoying people; thankful and non-thankful people; people who are like us and people who are different from us; and so on. As Jesus loved, served, and did good for all people, we, His people are to reflect that love, service, and goodness to all people.

Third, we are to especially do good to those who are of the household of faith, the Church. We are to focus special attention on doing good to fellow Christians in the Church. There is an old saying that goes, “Charity begins at home.” We are family and this church is our home. We share a most intimate relationship together here. We are to be closer to one another than we are even to our physical family. Therefore, when an individual Christian is in need or when the Church as a whole is in need, we joyfully leap at the opportunity to do good and be of service to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

As you celebrate the holiday this weekend, remember that *freedom* and *independence* do not mean free to do whatever you want independent of anyone else. Politically speaking, these terms meant that our forefathers wanted to be independent of foreign influence so that they could be free to work for the common good. Spiritually speaking, these terms mean something similar. By Jesus’ perfect life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection, we are free – free from sin, free from death, and free from hell. But that does not mean we are free to do whatever we want and think only of ourselves. We are independent of Satan’s evil influence and free now to do good for other people, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ. Martin Luther put it this way, “A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to every one.” So use your independence to be dependent and your freedom to serve. As Christ has done for you, may you, by the Holy Spirit’s guidance and power, do for others. Amen.