

INI

Galatians 5,25-6,10

Trinity 15 — 13 September 2015

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Epistle lesson from Saint Paul's Letter to the Galatians, which was read earlier:

Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfil the law of Christ.

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction: I think we've all heard of the term "planned obsolescence." It was coined by the head of General Motors, and originally it meant that in order to boost car sales car styles would change. Henry Ford, an engineer, did not believe in that. Well, when GM changed styles demand went up and soon GM was outselling Ford.

But beyond changes in styles – think of the continual change in fashion every fall – there is also the idea that things do not last forever. They wear out and have to be replaced. In this case, repair is out of the question.

I remember once when I broke the carafe of my coffee machine. I went to the store and found out that it was cheaper to buy a whole new machine than it was to buy a new carafe.

There are people, however, who restore old cars. They think

nothing of pouring thousands of hours and thousands of dollars into a restoration project. And it can be any kind of car – not just a classic, say, like a 1957 Chevrolet Bel-Air – it can be an Edsel.

So what makes one thing worthless and ready for the trash bin and something else worth restoring? It depends on what a person sees in that old thing.

In today's text, however, Paul is speaking about fixing and restoring rather than throwing out. Paul is not speaking about things, but he is speaking about people. And people are worth fixing, or restoring, because of the great love which God has shown to all people in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This brings me to my sermon theme for today, "**Mending The Tears In The Fabric Of Life.**" I'll develop this theme in three parts:

- 1) Ripped Lives;**
- 2) Mending Lives;** and,
- 3) Mending Takes Patience**

1) Ripped Lives. In writing to the Galatians, Paul addresses them as "brethren," or "brothers." In spite of their other faults – and they had theirs, just as we have ours –, Paul considers those to whom he is writing to be fellow Christians, brothers and sisters on account of their adoption by Jesus Christ.

And Paul tells them that some may be "caught in ... trespass."
What is Paul saying?

When he uses the word, "caught," that can also mean "surprised."
In other words, even Christians can sin. Indeed, they may be caught "unawares."

Perhaps we can remember Cain and Abel. Cain was jealous of Abel. God even told Abel, “Watch out, sin is crouching, and its desire is for you” (Genesis 4,7).

The world, our flesh, and the devil all lie at our feet and would lure us into sin. It would have us doubt God’s Word, and thus fall into sin. And then what?

The result of sin is always to tear us apart. It rips our relationship with God and our relationship with others. Sin has us please ourselves instead of God, and thus we “sow to the flesh” and “reap corruption.”

Corruption is rot. When we sin, we begin to rot from the inside out. Rot means we fall apart. We rip ourselves to shreds in corruption.

Outwardly all may appear O.K. In the book, *The Picture of Dorian Grey* by Oscar Wilde, we read of a man who leads a dissolute life, fearing neither God nor man. Outwardly he appears not only untroubled, but also full of the vigor of youth. But in his attic there is a picture of him as a young man. As he progresses in his dissolution, his outward appearance still appears to be youthful and fresh but his picture in the attic rots and his sin is manifest. Not only is the picture progressively becoming uglier and uglier, it also points to his eternal fate, that is, the fires of hell. But Oscar goes on and reasons why should he change if outwardly all is O.K.?

For those early Galatian Christians, Paul would have their fellow believers come to them with the Word of Law to show them their sin and then the Word of Forgiveness to restore them. This is a process of

2) Mending Lives. Paul now speaks about mending or restoring the person who has been overtaken in some trespass.

The word, “restore” is the same word that in the New Testament is used of mending fishing nets, and in Greek, it is a medical term that is used for setting broken bones.

The imagery of mending or setting is particularly powerful. For a fisherman, a net is essential to his livelihood. The nets have to be kept in constant repair. Thus, there is work to be done on shore, and that includes mending the nets. It means looking for the holes in the net, the tears and the rips, and slowing but surely mending them so that the net is once again fit for fishing.

Thus, we are given the command to assist our brothers and sisters in burden-bearing and restoring. And this restoration will fulfil the law of Christ.

When Paul speaks about the “law of Christ,” is Paul making Jesus into a new Moses? No. Rather, here the word “law” might better be translated as principle. And the principle of Jesus is the command to love.

He is the One Who first loved us, we who otherwise were the unlovable. He is the One Whose great love for us led Him to the Cross. There, on the Cross of death, He secured forgiveness for us; there on that Cross, He secured our restoration to be children of our heavenly Father; thereon that Cross, He accomplished the mending of the rips in the fabric of life caused by sin.

He rose from the dead to show all that sin and its corruption had no power over Him. His life was a life of sacrificial and forgiving love. This is the Word of Forgiveness that He shared with all His disciples — and not only Peter — after His resurrection. In the locked room where the disciples gathered

for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them ... “Peace be with you; as the father has sent Me, so I send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.” (John 20,19ff)

And He has entrusted this ministry of restoration and mending to each of us.

3) Mending Takes Patience. Paul then says, “Do not be weary in well doing.” Another way to put this, would be “do not lose heart.”

Net-mending or soul-restoration can take time.

This is accomplished in a spirit of gentleness, which is one of the “fruits of the Spirit” (Galatians 5,22ff). It is accomplished in the knowledge that we too are forgiven sinners.

Thus, we are warned not to lord it over others. Let no one think that he is something. When we speak with a fellow believer who has fallen into trespass, we are not to think ourselves better than he or she. In God’s eyes, what are we? We stand under the curse of the Law and it is only on account of the work of God’s Son, Jesus, that in God’s eyes we are forgiven and are something.

We bear our own burden as we daily examine ourselves in the light of God’s Law. Here we see our sins and ask for forgiveness. This forgiveness is reinforced when we hear forgiveness proclaimed in Jesus’ name. Jesus reassures us of His love and forgiveness as He shares with us His true Body and Blood under, in, and with the bread and wine of His Holy Supper. This is the strength of forgiveness which Jesus gave to Peter before Peter denied Jesus; Jesus said to Peter: “I have prayed for

you, that your faith may not fail you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22,32).

In the same way, when confronted by a broken bone, a doctor sets the bones, and then the healing process begins. And to mend a broken bone takes time. Either a net or a bone may be ripped apart or broken in the blink of an eye, but it takes time to mend, time to repair, time to restore.

Sometimes people expect instant results. Perhaps it is because on TV or in a movie everything is solved in an hour or two. Life, however, is not always like that. Not everything is solved or repaired in a short time.

Thus, our task of burden bearing is to be done with this in mind. We are not to lose heart in bearing the burdens of others, and they in turn are not to lose heart as forgiveness works healing.

In speaking of this text, Luther says:

Christians must have strong shoulders and mighty bones, that they bear flesh, that is, the weakness of their brethren. Love, therefore, is mild, courteous, patient, not in receiving, but in giving; for it is constrained to wink at many things, and to bear them. Faithful teachers see in the Church many errors and offenses which they are compelled to bear. In household affairs there are many things done which displease the master of the house. But if we bear and wink at our own offenses which we daily commit, let us also bear other men’s faults, according to this saying: “Bear one another’s burdens,” and: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” (Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, v. 6,2).

Conclusion: In the fabric of life, we see rips. Are they worth mending?

You bet.

Perhaps a story can best illustrate this – and perhaps I’ve used it before. We all watch the Olympics on TV. In any event, only one athlete wins the gold and the others come with bronze or silver or nothing. One wins great endorsements, the others fade into footnotes in the history books. One is remembered, the rest forgotten.

But look at another Olympics. It was a foot race. The runners were lined up. The gun went off — but one runner fell out of the blocks and hurt himself. The other runners realized what happened, and rather than race towards the finish line, they came back and picked up their fallen competitor. Then all nine runners linked arms with the one who was hurt, and they all crossed the finish line together.

This happened in the special Olympics, with those who were physically or mentally challenged. But what a picture of burden-bearing, and more importantly, restoration.

This is the Word of Forgiveness in Christ. We are all to be winners by forgiving, for in this Jesus gives us true life and salvation.

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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