

Galatians 5:1, 13-25
“Don’t Look Back!”
Third Sunday after Pentecost

June 30, 2019
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

When the Holy Spirit brings us to faith, He sets us on the path to eternal life.

The early Christians described that path as “the Way” (Acts 9:2; 24:14), because Jesus is the Way. We walk on that path through our earthly life to the destination of eternal life, but this path is not always easy.

As we follow the path, we can become disoriented and end up going in the wrong direction.

One such thing happened back in 1995. A Detroit bus driver finished his shift on his route and was heading back to the terminal. But somehow he took a wrong turn. He didn’t arrive at the terminal and a short time later his supervisors started looking for him.

Meanwhile, the bus driver’s wife called the terminal to report that her husband might be disoriented from the medication he was taking.

For six hours, the bus and its driver could not be found. Finally the state police found the bus and driver – 200 miles northwest of Detroit. The bus was motoring slowly down a rural two-lane road, weaving slightly from side to side.

The police pulled the bus over, and the driver said he was lost.

The police news release later stated: “The driver had no idea where he was and agreed he had made a wrong turn somewhere. Apparently this had not occurred to him during the four hours he drove without finding the bus depot.”

We all have made a wrong turn in our life, but we should all strive to get back on the correct path. For this driver, and us, sometimes it takes an intervention to get us back on the correct path.

[The Situation in Galatia]

In our epistle lesson, the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul intervene to get the Galatians back on the correct path. He wrote: ***“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another”*** (Galatians 5:1, 13).

So, what was going on at the Galatian Church? Well, we heard last Sunday that many of the Galatian Christians were focusing upon their differences. So, the Apostle Paul reminded them that through faith in Jesus they have all become adopted as children of the Heavenly Father.

Now, that wasn't the only issue within the Galatian Church. In today's epistle lesson, we learned that there were many in the Galatian Church who thought God's moral law didn't matter. They thought that the gospel meant that they could live any way they wanted as a Christian.

Now, Paul never taught them this. So, where did this idea come from? Well, after Paul left Galatia, some people began persuading the Galatians into accepting a different teaching. These persuaders, whom Paul called “trouble-makers” and “agitators”, convinced many in Galatia to abandon God's moral law to instead follow their own personal desires.

In short, these persuaders were perverting the true Gospel of Christ. They were teaching the Galatians to focus upon their self-interests rather than care for each other. On top of that, they were trying to convince the Galatians to conform to worldly desires, rather than trusting in Jesus.

Does this sound familiar? Some things never change. Today, the world desires Christ's Church to conform to the world. At the same time, our sinful flesh wants to give in to worldly desires.

We often want to compromise with our sinful flesh thinking, “It's really not that bad.”

Our sinful flesh has an arrogant pride that resists the one true God. It is our natural tendency to desire to control our lives without direction from God Himself.

When we abandon what God reveals in the Scriptures, we make gods of ourselves. When we respect the opinions of others instead of God's Word, we elevate their ideas above God.

This all leads in the wrong direction. Instead of following Christ, we look back and desire the works of the flesh.

You see, the sinful world is constantly bombarding us and trying to persuade us into thinking that sins against God are not all that bad. In fact, they say they are not bad at all. The world says following your every desire makes you free. In reality, remaining in sin only separates you from God and shackles you to Satan.

It used to be that it would be shameful to make many sins public. Today, many people announce their sin publicly. They are proud of their sin. They take pride in their sin.

They identify themselves by their sin, rather than acknowledge themselves as a child of the Heavenly Father. They become wrapped in their sin, rather than wrapped in Christ's righteousness.

This was the attitude that was spreading within the Galatian Church. They believed that since they were free in Christ that they could act in any way they wished. They believed freedom to mean: "I can do what I want and I don't care what anyone else thinks." Now, this is **not** what Paul taught. This is **not** what Jesus taught Paul. This was **not** the freedom won by Christ.

[Works of the Flesh]

Paul is reminding the Christians in Galatia and us here today that we are **not** to use our freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but instead through love serve one another.

You see, by focusing on their sinful desires, their focus was upon themselves. They were thinking inward, rather than outward. They were thinking only of themselves rather than their neighbor.

This is what Paul was most upset about. You see, these persuaders, whom Paul called “trouble-makers” and “agitators” were infecting the church with lies. And these lies would only lead the Galatian Church away from salvation in Jesus and to damnation.

As the under-shepherd of this flock, Paul was not going to let this happen to his sheep.

So, he warns them as a loving father would warn his dear children of the works of the flesh. He writes a long list of self-centered vices that do nothing to support and care for one’s neighbor: ***“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God”*** (Galatians 5:19-21).

And as we know from Jesus, when we even think of committing a sin, we are guilty, because all sins come from the heart. When we hear Paul’s list of the works of the flesh, each one of us is guilty. Our sinful flesh wants us to follow the works of the flesh, rather than serve our neighbor.

Each of the works of the flesh separates us from the love of God. And don’t be fooled, it is ***not*** God leaving us, it is us leaving God. By following our sinful desires, we are choosing our own self-centered interests first.

But, remember, the Detroit bus driver? The police intervened to save him. Likewise, God intervenes to save His children. When Paul warns the Galatians and us about the works of the flesh, he is intervening for us to save us. Paul is writing this as a loving father would to his children.

Paul isn’t saying that if you have done works of flesh that you are bound to hell. But, Paul is warning all Christians that if we would continue in sin, we have chosen a different path from that of Jesus.

Now, all of us are guilty of works of the flesh. We constantly look out for our own self-interest above our neighbor. What are we to do?

Well, Paul is not talking about a single outburst of these sins, but rather an ongoing, characteristic pattern of behavior. So if you see yourself drenched in sin, also know that God has given you the Way out and His name is Jesus. You see, through His death and resurrection, He has forgiven the sin of all people who repent and follow Him. He died and rose so everyone who trusts in Him would inherit the kingdom of God.

But, if you do not confess and repent of your sin, you are refusing to follow Jesus and instead you have chosen a different path. You are refusing your inheritance of eternal life that has been won for you through Jesus Christ.

This is what Paul is warning his church about. Paul does not want to lose his flock to self-centered sinful desires. He wants his entire flock to inherit the kingdom of God.

[Fruit of the Spirit]

Now, as both saint and sinner, our faith and sinful flesh are constantly struggling with each other. We want to live as children of God, but our sinful desires often sneak into our lives.

What are we to do? How do we grow and become stronger in the Christian faith? How do we remain on the right path?

Through Baptism, we have become children of God. At your Baptism, the Holy Spirit also created a new attitude within us. This new attitude is the fruit of the Spirit, which is ***“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”*** (Galatians 5:22-23).

So, instead of putting the focus on our own sinful desires, the Spirit guides us in serving our neighbor, which is our God-given vocation, as we bear fruit and grow in the Christian faith.

And, in case we don't know what exactly the fruit of the Spirit looks like, we can look to Jesus.

You see, Jesus unselfishly did what we could never do for ourselves. ***“For while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”*** (Romans 5:8). He gave Himself for you and for me.

With the Spirit's help, we live and act different from the sinful world. We follow a different path from the world. We follow Jesus who suffered the fierce punishment of our sins and rose again to provide victory over death. So, whoever repents and follows Jesus receives forgiveness, eternal life and salvation.

Now, our path following Christ is never easy. Jesus never said being a Christian is easy.

Our path is a struggle, our sinful flesh wants to look back, but God gives us strength knowing that whenever we fall into sin, He is there to pick us back up when we ask Him for forgiveness.

God also gives us His Means of Grace, which forgives our sins and strengthens our weak faith. So when we hear and follow God's Word and receive His true body and true blood in the Sacrament, we are put back on the right path. We are forgiven and our faith is strengthened. We are right back on the path to eternal life as we follow Christ and love our neighbor. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠