

“STRENGTH FOR THE WEARY”

Galatians 6:1-10, 14-18

The recliner easy chair—it becomes so desirable in our culture where we have climate-controlled houses, all kinds of electronic entertainment (cell phones work great while sitting in such a chair), and our own private homes sealed off from the rest of the world. It makes it very easy for us to grow weary of doing anything.

But even for people in Paul’s day who lived with much less privacy, had no electronic devices, and had nothing like an easy chair it was easy for people, as he said, “to grow weary in doing good.” It takes effort to help other people. There is only so much we can do. And it can seem to do no good. Last month we heard about visiting people in nursing homes during Sunday Bible class as Ruth-Ann Grabau, a deaconess intern working at Perry Lutheran Homes, told us about how we can reach out to the elderly. It can be a challenge because unlike working with children who gradually learn and pick up things from us, the elderly decline and get worse. What frustrates us about them—their lack of hearing, their forgetfulness, their lack of attention only gets worse.

Yet there are other things that can very much weary us in our efforts to help others. Psychologists have done studies in the area of “altruism”—that’s the fancy word for doing good things for others. In the so-called “Public Goods Game.” Groups of four were given so many tokens to represent money. In the course of the game they could each invest money in the whole group. In the end 40% of the earnings were given to each of the participants. As expected, the stingy ones who contributed the least, were rejected by the group. But surprisingly, almost as much as those who were most generous. Somehow, selfishness and selflessness were considered to be morally equivalent.

This seems to come from an early age to people. Today young people use the word “glazing” to describe what people used to call brown nosing.” The idea is that you act and do good just to gain the favor of adults. “Glazing” can be harmless, like simply to poke fun at someone for obsessing over their favorite celebrity. But it can also cross into mean-spirited territory, like being used to mock someone for being kind and respectful. Phrases like “good boy” or “good girl” are also being tossed around to mock peers when carrying out simple, everyday tasks. The popularity of these phrases might hint at a cultural shift—those who were kind, courteous, and helpful once earned a social credit, but now are stereotyped as people-pleasers and too well-trained.

That can make it hard for us to do good. There is the fear that in trying to help we might be perceived as a “goody-too-shoes,” some to “mind your own business,” or someone with ulterior motives. And there is the fear that the “Good Samaritan” clause won’t apply to us so that it is better to do nothing than to risk hurting someone else even if our intentions are good.

I am reminded of the worship service written here years ago by Pastor Richard Kapfer describing the example of service that Jesus gave on the night before He died by washing the feet of the disciples. Let us repeat it now:

P: We confess to You, Lord Jesus, that we are afraid to be servants of one another.

C: How will it look, getting up from the table, taking a basin of water and a towel, and washing the feet of the disciples? Won't they come to expect it?

P: While they move ahead in the Kingdom. I'll remain the taken-for-granted foot washer.

C: How will it look, getting up from my comfortable routine and helping him/her? Will they understand that I can only help them this once? Won't they take me for granted as they always have?

P: We're afraid to be servants, Lord. We've tried it occasionally in the past, and we remember—the surprise on some faces: “You, a foot washer?” . . .the questioning look on others: “You're washing my feet?” . . . the haughty look on others: “Oh, yes, you the foot washer.”

C: We're afraid of that, Lord. And we're afraid of the effect-what it will cost us:

P: In self-respect, in time, in losing our place, in losing out, in losing. How will it look, Lord?

No wonder we can grow weary in doing good!

So wouldn't it be great to get some encouragement? The studies show that when things are done anonymously there is much less chance that people will see ulterior motives. But then how do we know they are helping? Oscar Wilde put it this way: “The nicest feeling in the world is to do a good deed anonymously – and have somebody find out.” But what if no one does?

St. Paul tells us:

A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

He connects the reward with the Holy Spirit who gives eternal life and reaping the harvest at the proper time. No one else may know what we have done. In the larger scheme of things, we are forgotten. We have this church to gather us together. Do any of us know about the people who founded this place? But God does!

Paul says, “For at the proper time we will reap a harvest.” What is “the proper time”? It is the time set by God, just as a harvest is not determined by what people think or do, but by

how the crops created and sustained by God ripen for harvest. Behind what we do is the Holy Spirit. Of the Spirit Paul says, “From the Spirit will reap eternal life.” Even if no human is left on this earth, no documentation, no picture to reflect on what we have done, God knows. He will make that harvest come true. It might be something we see in our lives now. But even if not, it will be reaped in heaven.

Not only will our good deeds done anonymously be made aware by God in heaven, He will also show the good deeds He has done through us which we are not even aware of. We will be rewarded by what brings God greatest happiness—seeing people respond to His love! That will be no momentary joy which will fade with time. No, “the Spirit will reap eternal life.” That is what we can share with each other. That is how we carry one another’s burdens. That is how we can “do good to all people.”