

WELCOME 12th May 2024 – 7th SUNDAY IN EASTER '24 B

Galatians 6:1-16

Welcome! Happy Mother's Day! It's great to be together again today! We made it home safely...Thank you for your prayers...got us through an adventure in air travel & all the other odds & ends of our trip. Truly blessed to go & doubly blessed to be back among all of you! As always you have **Growing Praise** inserts **Bible Study Qs** in your worship orders to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & you can share that with someone else. **Zoom Bible Studies resume THIS Friday @ 1:00 p.m.**

As we move into this week... One small bit of Latin I learned...*"Homo incurvatus in se"* - means Humanity curved in on **itself**. St. Augustine used that phrase 16-1700 yrs ago to describe the world that has removed its gaze from God & placed it firmly on **itself**. The news stories & headlines of late testify to a world curved in on itself. We've made life to be all about us...radical self-expression...pursuing my hopes, my dreams, my desires, my best me, my preferred political policies/politicians/practice...etc...But the *CURVED IN* life isn't *FULLNESS* of life. In fact, it's an *EMPTYING* of life; a vicious spiral toward nothingness.

So Paul writes to the Galatians w/ the good news that Jesus crucified risen & ruling un-curves us. Jesus like a spiritual orthopedic surgeon straightens us out, restores our posture & re-focuses our gaze on him as he leads us in living an uncurved life **FOR OTHERS**. This straightening out, this uncurving is born, nurtured, strengthened, practiced, & sustained exclusively in Xn community. Christ comes to us to strengthen & straighten our posture today as his transforming grace in you gives you the power & the vision for living exclusively for others.

So *let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up. Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially to those in the family of faith.*

We said last week "Freedom in Christ is always & only freedom to be used for someone else. Every chain Christ breaks for me links me to you in self-giving self-offering love." Hebrews says, *"Let us think of ways to motivate one another (spur one another on) to acts of love & good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near."* – **Heb 10:24-25** Every chance we get, let us work for the benefit of all, starting w/ the people closest to us in the community of faith & for Christ's sake not grow weary in doing good beyond it.

We'll experience & share that today...Let's pray together...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Holy and gracious saving Father, let this day be a worthy celebration of Christ's resurrection and the living hope into which you have brought us. In the light streaming from the empty tomb, move our hearts to be free from worry, unchained from fear, and released from distraction. Open our minds to your Spirit that we may love you more deeply, obey you more fervently and worship you in living to serve & care for others more than ourselves...Through Jesus Christ, our living brother, Saviour and friend we pray...Amen

Let's sing The Lord is By My Side & then we'll hear God's word from Paul to the church in Galatia & Wagga Wagga

FAITH CHAT:

1. Where have you seen the principle 'you reap what you sow' at work?
2. How do you exercise the love of Christ in you for people around you, both *WITHIN* & those *NOT YET IN* the family of disciples?

7th SUNDAY IN EASTER '24 B – LIVING EXCLUSIVELY...FOR OTHERS

The name might mean something to you...Diane von Fürstenberg...fashion designer? I know nothing about fashion, but famous people always seem to do stuff that catches my attention & Mrs von Fürstenberg caught mine when she said...“My best friend is me, and I take good care of me.” I can't think of a more 21st century mindset that is also the epitome of “*Homo incurvatus in se*” Humanity curved in on itself. “My best friend is me, & I take good care of me.” wow! But...I don't think Mrs von Fürstenberg is the only person on earth who believes that or lives that way...I also don't believe My best friend is me, I take good care of me” is a 20th/21st C invention.

That mindset is as old as Genesis 3. From the moment Adam/Eve ate the only fruit in the Garden God told them to avoid, humans have been convinced we can meet our own deep needs by our own limited resources. The default mode of the human heart is self-sufficiency/self-justification. We will defend to the death our right to radical self-expression...to pursuing above all our own hopes dreams aspirations beliefs attitudes & values...at the expense of everyone else...I'll do me even if it costs you. We want God & the people around us to notice what incredible people we are & we'll do anything toward that end...even if it costs “you.”

But Paul exhorts the church (Galatia & today) to understand that kind of radical self-expression/self-sufficiency/self-justification...worldview & lifestyle that wraps the universe around the axis of “me” is not life in its fullness but in fact the opposite... *Don't be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant. Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay & death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit.* No matter how hard we try to live like we've got this...we are finally/ultimately accountable to God. We are not the centre of the universe. “My best friend is me, & I take good care of me” only & always ends in decay & death. (Bible says but I'm gonna do) The *CURVED* IN life isn't *FULLNESS* of life. It's an *EMPTYING* of life; a vicious spiral toward nothingness.

BUT those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit. There is Paul says, a worldview – way of living – that leads to innumerable joys satisfaction contentment wholeness healing & love that lasts forever...To live by the Spirit from the foundation of life in Christ that is ours by our union w/ Christ in his death/rez. Throughout Galatians Paul makes the point: *My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me & gave himself for me. – Gal 2:20 and again “All who have been united with Christ in baptism have been clothed with Christ.” – Gal 3:27* The center of the universe & center of my life...Christ crucified/risen/ruling & living in me & calling the shots.

Or here from today's text...*As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world has been crucified, & the world's interest in me has also died. Because by the cross the Father has reconciled you to himself in Christ...every debt is cancelled & every sin forgiven...death defeated...hell conquered...you declared righteous...you made a child of God...no condemnation...the power of sin over you broken...Every facet of life is to be lived by the Spirit of Christ living in you. Because of God's mercy ...because he held nothing back to bring you in from darkness & death to light & life eternal...spared not even his own Son...YOU NOW hold nothing back...take all you are & say “Father this is yours.” God doesn't want part of your life. He wants it all. God doesn't want 90 minutes of your week; he wants all 7 days. God wants every part of your life: your finances, your sex life, your work, your hobbies, your hopes dreams aspirations beliefs attitudes & values...your time & relationships, & most of all your affections/passions...that which you desire more than anything. “Father this is yours.” This world no longer satisfies or holds my affection – Ps 73:25*

And as surely as you are united to Christ by being baptized into his death/rez, you are **AT THAT SAME MOMENT** united to each other as his church...And life in community is hard/messy/challenging...Immediately ^{b/4} our text today Paul writes: *Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another. – Gal 5:26* Why? Because those things show up at some point in almost **ALL** relationships. We're all tempted to think we're better, smarter, know more, can do more, insight or experience...We all know we have habits that bug other people...& we kinda like it. We're going to be tempted to envy...jealousy...But the largest temptation is to say, “None of my business.” In the Xn community...the church – the fellowship of disciples – the flock of followers of Jesus we cannot say, “That's their problem. Not mine.” We do not have the luxury of complete anonymity/privacy...not gossip or telling tales...but...

Dear brothers & sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently & humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself. Share each other's burdens, & in this way obey the law of Christ. Christian life – life as a follower of Jesus is **ALWAYS** lived in relationship w/ others...Xn life is **ALWAYS** a community experience. I have said over & over for the 20 years you've known me that there is no such thing as solo Xnty... Being freed from sin death & the death spiral of “My best friend is me, & I take good care of me” of being uncurved & brought into fellowship w/ others is born, nurtured, strengthened, practiced, & sustained exclusively in Xn community. You can't get life in Christ anywhere but in the community of followers of Jesus called the church. And in the community called the church, my sin is not just my business. Your sin is not just

your business. Instead of being arrogant or irritating or envious of others, we're called to look out for each other. When we become aware of someone else's sin or struggle, we go quietly privately & gently to them in order to restore their freedom in & fellowship w/ Christ...always in gentleness, humility & care not to fall into the trap out from which you hope to lead them.

God chose us in love to be part of his family & live out his character & his kingdom here on earth. Who we are/who God says we are is already accomplished by Jesus' death/rez & our baptism into that death/new life. Our belonging to/oneness in the body of Christ is a gift in our hands...a GIFT from God to us. Every part of you is connected to the other disciples around you because you are "Christ's body." And the awesome part of that...no one is irrelevant Paul would write: *In God's grace, he has given us different gifts for doing certain things well.* - Rom 12:6 My gifts aren't necessarily the same as your gifts...But ALL gifts come from God for the use of HIS church...

And Paul knows...we know...this community called "church" is always under the scrutiny of the world. The not-yet-Xn world is always watching the church to see if this "life in Christ" business really makes a difference...to see if we're real & genuine in matching what we say & what we do...So to the Romans Paul says: *Don't copy the behaviour & customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.* - Rom 12:2 To copy this world is to try to make our lives look like something other than Jesus. If we set our standard as something other than Jesus we have trouble...deadly trouble. Trevin Wax writes: "The great need of the world is a church that offers something other than its own echo." The world needs the church to show something other than more of the same. The world needs us to be different; to live differently than it does; to offer a model of family that has stood the test & trials of time, to demonstrate generosity, offer ways to parent, engage w/ strangers & be a presence in our communities that builds for others not simply exist for ourselves. Too many Xns/far too many churches fail right there; either they live in a bubble that won't let outsiders in, or they're sadly indistinguishable from the non-Xn world in which we live...they look & act like everybody else...

To the Ephesians Paul would say: "...God has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ...to equip God's people to do his work & build up the church." God wants YOU to use YOUR gifts to build & strengthen HIS church. God intends the community of faith/body of Christ to grow larger & stronger as each of us puts our gifts & skills & energies to work in the world in the name of Jesus on behalf of those who are in need, especially those who need to hear perhaps for the first time the saving good news of Jesus' death & rez...the forgiveness of sin & the defeat of death & the forces of evil...Who need to see love made real compassion in the flesh

kindness in the face of another...Every part of the church is to be engaged in Christ's mission declaring in word & deed his resurrection victory in every arena of life. I have often quoted Dietrich Bonhoeffer like on today's GP: "The Church is the Church only when it exists for others...not dominating, but helping & serving. It must tell people of every calling what it means to live for Christ, to exist for others." As we do that, as we live facing outwards toward others...for others...this world slowly but surely begins to resemble more & more the prayer Jesus gave us... "on earth as it is in heaven." To live exclusively for others is to live out the power of the resurrection that rebuilds lives, strengthens families, transforms communities, & shapes nations & history itself. I started today quoting St Augustine...

As Rome collapsed, the Empire falling under the weight of its own immorality & corruption & attacks from warrior Germanic tribes...Augustine preached to the remaining Xns in the city: "Bad times! Hard times!" — This is what men are saying. But let us live well, and the times shall be well. We are the times. Such as we are, such are the times. Augustine knew that empowered by the resurrection of Christ the church has the power to move the arc of history toward joy & hope & restoration & fullness of life & love. It's still true...

So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up. Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially to those in the family of faith.

I have over the last few years asked this question a few times...I ask it of myself regularly...

TAKE IT HOME –

If Living Water Fellowship ceased to exist, do you think the people of Wagga Wagga would notice? Would they care? What would be different or lost?

More importantly...How might you help move history's arc in this city for the sake of Christ?

Let's pray with that in mind...

Living Lord Jesus, you appeared to your disciples in their hour of fear & gave your Spirit to encourage their anxious hearts. Come to us by that same Spirit & open our hearts so we can boldly live our hope in you in our world. Equip us to bring peace to those trapped in sorrow or distress and courage to those shackled by worry & alarm. Strengthen our faith & intensify our witness so that we offer to others your promise of abundant life, unceasing joy & unending love...through you alone we hope & pray...Amen