

The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity
Galatians 5:25-6:10: "The Lord Keeps His Family Together."
September 19/20, 2020 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, we humbly ask You, according to the riches of Your glory, to strengthen us with might by Your Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith, so that, being rooted and grounded in love we may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 161)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the fifth and sixth chapters of St Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. / Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load. / One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches. Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who gives us rest from our heaviest burden of sin, so that all other burdens carried by faith in Him feel easy and light (Mat. 11:28-30), dear fellow redeemed:

"I love you. You love me. We're a happy family." You probably recognize those words from a popular kids show featuring a large purple and green dinosaur. Impressionable preschoolers loved to watch and sing along. They thought Barney was nice and fun, and they believed that he cared about them. His song taught them that since he loved them and they loved him, they were one big happy family. The message was memorable for its simplicity. But it takes more than mutual love to make a family.

So what does make a family? As you can imagine, the definition of "family" has become less definite in recent years. The traditional definition of family is: "The group comprising a husband and wife and their dependent children, constituting a fundamental unit in the

organization of society" (*Webster's 1913 Dictionary*). Other definitions of family are less specific, less concrete, more like the Barney definition. At the same time that society is moving the boundaries of what a family is, we see less stability in home life and much more brokenness. A passing love or a vague commitment do not make a family.

Family requires more; it calls for "blood, sweat, and tears." Family begins when a man leaves his father and mother and holds fast to his wife. Here two different bloodlines are brought together. A man and woman are joined in marriage and become "*one flesh*" (*Gen. 2:24*). More often than not, the union of husband and wife brings about children. The mother's blood provides nutrients to the growing baby in her womb. And then the baby is born to be loved and cared for by its parents.

But parenting is not easy; it requires more than a little "sweat equity." There are diapers to change, illnesses and injuries to tend to, attitudes to adjust, and crises to manage. The mother especially feels the pressure of showing the children they are loved, and the father feels the pressure of providing for them. Because of the fall into sin, God told Adam and Eve that there would be pain in family life. Parents and children would struggle along until they returned to dust (*Gen. 3:16-19*).

So there would also be tears. Tears when family problems are beyond our power or ability to fix. Tears when families are divided by disagreements and conflicts. Tears when spouses and parents and children breathe their last. But there are happy tears too. Tears of joy for birthdays and big accomplishments and renewed health and the expansion of the family circle. Family is more than "I love you. You love me." Family is a gift from God formed and forged through blood, sweat, and tears.

The spiritual family of God was also brought about through blood, sweat, and tears, but not our own. Our adoption into God's family was made possible by the sacrifice of God's Son in our place. As His death approached, He cried for the people who rejected Him as Savior (*Luk. 19:41-44*). "*Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace!*" He said (v. 42). Later that week as He knelt in earnest prayer to His Father, He shook in agony, "*and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground*" (*Luk. 22:44*).

Then He went to the cross carrying the sins of all people. Blood dripped from the stripes of His scourging and from the gouges made by the crown of thorns. Then it ran from His hands and feet as the nails were driven into the cross. His tears, His sweat, and His blood were all for sinners. He did all the work, all the heavy lifting, to win our salvation. Nothing was left undone. "*It is finished!*" He said before breathing His last (*Joh. 19:30*).

His death brought us life. It was the ultimate sacrifice. He died so that all sinners would be reconciled to God. He died to make atonement for every sin. He died so we could have a share in eternal life. All who believe in Him by the power of the Holy Spirit are joined to Him. We are covered in His righteousness and cleansed by His blood. "*[I]n Christ Jesus [we] are all sons of God, through faith*" (*Gal. 3:26*).

We did not get ourselves into God's family any more than a baby gets himself conceived. We were reborn spiritually in Holy Baptism by the power of the Holy Spirit (*Joh. 3:5*). Because God

does the work, all have equal standing in His family. One is not greater or less than another. God does not play favorites. We are equally loved and forgiven according to His tremendous grace.

That means there is no reason for conceit or self-centeredness in the family of God. We believers should ask ourselves, "What good things do we have that God did not give us? What is the source of our abilities and strength and wealth? What is it that enables our faithfulness to the Lord?" The answer is that God does all these things. But we love to take credit for them. If I am successful, I want to accept the glory for it. If I have a good reputation and a clean record, I am eager to pat myself on the back.

On the flip side, it is oh so easy to point out the failures of others. "If only they got their act together like we have. If only they stopped complaining and started working!" We like to compare ourselves with others because it makes us feel better about ourselves. Seeing a life in shambles gets us thinking we have it all together. Focusing on their mistakes helps us forget about our own.

But such comparison does not put our righteousness and faithfulness on display. It shows our sin. Our sin causes us to look down on others, to think we are better than they are, to gloat about their spiritual stumbling. This is not how Jesus, our Brother-in-the-Flesh, treated us. He looked with mercy upon us, joined us in the depths of our darkness, and shouldered the burden of our sin.

He calls us to do the same for the brothers and sisters in our spiritual family. When a fellow believer sins, our job is not to gossip about it. It's not to shun him. Our job is to speak the Word of reconciliation to him, to share the love of Christ who paid for all sin. In this way, the wounded soul may be restored *"in a spirit of gentleness,"* and the bleeding in the body of Christ can be stopped.

We extend grace toward others because the time will come – and probably quite often – that we will need grace extended toward us. St. Paul writes that everyone has his own load to bear. The devil and his fellow demons have special temptations ready for each one of us. They know how to tempt our sinful flesh to anger or worry or pride or selfishness. None of us can claim to have come through these temptations unscathed, to think that we have lived consistently righteous lives. Again, the text says, *"if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself."*

So we members of the family of God are the walking wounded. We are the spiritually sick. We are weaker than we want to admit. Recognizing this about ourselves makes it much easier to see the help that our spiritual brothers and sisters need. They are as we are. They struggle as we struggle. They suffer as we suffer. They need mercy and help and forgiveness just like we do. So Paul writes, *"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."*

In His family, God gives the young to care for the elderly, and the elderly to encourage the young. He gives some to be good listeners and some for wise advice. He gives some to be generous and charitable with their means and others to give of their time. He gives pastors to teach and pray for His people, and His people to support and pray for their pastor.

By ourselves, each one of us is weak and vulnerable to all sorts of attacks. This is why the devil loves to try to divide the family of God, to turn us against one another, to drive us all apart. But God's Word is the glue that holds us together. The Word of His Law exposes our conceit and pride. And the Word of His Gospel brings us forgiveness for those sins and relief from our burdens.

As we together look to Jesus in faith, we find in Him an inexhaustible storehouse of grace. Through the message of His perfect life lived for us, His holy death to save us, and His resurrection to secure the victory, we find healing when we have been wronged, help when we are hurting, and comfort in our pain. By His Word of grace, **The Lord Keeps His Family Together.**

Even though each of us is imperfect and weak, He promises to work powerful blessings through us for the people He brings into our lives. Whatever blood, sweat, and tears are required for our spiritual family or our physical one, His grace gives us the strength to carry on even when the job is hard. He helps us *"do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."*

When a burden feels too heavy for us, it is not too heavy for Him. He will carry it—and us—through every difficulty we face and will bring us safely to His heavenly kingdom.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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