

Pentecost 7C (lectionary 14)
Text: Galatians 6:1-10
sermon by Rev. Robert Klonowski
Faith Lutheran Church, Homewood, IL
July 3, 2016

RESTORE

We read this morning from St. Paul's letter to the Galatians. I don't know how well you know Galatians, but you should; any time you spend with Galatians will be worth it. Like so many of Paul's letters it is addressed to an early Christian community in which there was a church fight going on. The issue was whether *new* members of the church had to act like the *old* members, if they were to *be* members. Paul's response to this nonsense is summed up in the middle of the letter, chapter 3, verse 1: "Oh, you foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?!"

That is not one of Paul's more subtle theological arguments, and maybe for that reason it's one of my favorite lines in Scripture. Delete "Galatians" and insert your own name there, and insert your own particular brand of foolishness. Read the letter with that in mind, and you'll find that it holds great wisdom for you.

Our reading for this morning is wisdom indeed, from much later in the letter, chapter 6, when Paul has moved on to how the church fight ends. "My friends," he writes, "if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness."

You ever been in a church fight, yourself? Or how about a family fight, maybe one serious enough that a relationship was broken? Ever break off a friendship, or had one broken off? This is the Fourth of July weekend, when we celebrate our country. How are we doing in our country these days, in our national fights over racial injustice, over inequalities of wealth and opportunity, in our partisan fights across the political spectrum?

St. Paul has wisdom for us. One: “you who have received the Spirit should restore” Restoration is always our work. Are you mad at someone right now? Has someone offended against you, been “detected in a transgression” as St. Paul puts it? Your goal is always the restoration of such a one to health and community. That means no condemnation of the other; no rejoicing in the wrong of the other, as St. Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 13. If you find yourself doing that, you’re on the wrong road. And no self-justification, either; no proving how right you are at the expense of the one who’s committed the wrong. This is why you should never fight by email – I guarantee that message will be as self-justifying as it ever can be. No condemnation; no self-justification; in Christ we are about the work of restoration.

Knowing the Greek word that Paul uses here is helpful. It is *katartizo*, restoration, and this week I learned that it’s actually a medical term used about the setting of a broken bone. We restore; we set it again, so it can heal.

Two: in this process, says Paul, “take care that you yourselves are not tempted.” Tempted by what? In the first place, he says, we are tempted “if those who are nothing think they are something.” Puffing yourself up into something you’re not is just self-deceit, says Paul, and the work of restoration is good honest work that can’t afford phony nonsense. But you know, just as deceitful and just as phony is the other, maybe opposite temptation, when those who have been made something by God, think they are nothing. It takes both ends of a broken bone to heal, so you gotta stand up for, you gotta hold up your own end! So “all must test their own work,” says Paul, “then that work ... will become a cause for pride.” Pride?! Whoa! I thought pride was one of the seven deadly sins, something to be avoided at all costs! Not the way Paul uses it here. Pride – in your own work, in who God has made you – is here something to be eagerly sought. “All must carry their own loads,” he writes. You gotta know and carry your own end of the restoration – what the responsibility is, on your side of the break – as well as know and respect the other end of the broken bone.

Three: we are to restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Gentleness – we have to talk about that word. All too often in the church community we mistake gentleness for niceness, as if the spirit we seek would be one in which wrongs would not be addressed, because we'd rather be nice; in which to be polite would be more important than to be honest; as if we could somehow get to restoration by pretending there was nothing here that needs it; nothing to restore. That would not be gentleness; that would be complicity in what is wrong.

No; gentleness Paul identifies as one of the gifts of the Spirit, which means that gentleness comes bringing us real strength. Gentleness comes with power, then; the power of the Spirit. In a few minutes we baptize Soren Léon Desaulniers, and we will invoke in him the gifts of the Spirit, and as described in 2 Timothy "God does not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power." Gentleness does not back down in the face of what is wrong. Gentleness does the steady work of restoration, confident in its own power, without condemnation of the other and without self-justification. Gentleness is self-assured in its holy work. Think here of any gentle teacher you have had in your life. That's the spirit, in which Paul says we are to do the work of restoration.

Finally: where there is conflict we are always to be about the work of restoration, but restoration to better health and community may not mean restoration of things as they were before, status quo ante. Sometimes the good work of restoration will mean divorce; sometimes it will mean less contact with the drinking alcoholic or the using addict; the work of restoration will always mean living with the consequences of what has been done. When healing happens, of a broken bone or a wound, the scar that is the mark of the healing will look different from the original. That's not a bad thing; wear your scars with pride, whenever they are the marks of the holy work of restoration.

Enough. For you wherever you need it, and for our country because we sorely need it, I pray the words of St. Paul: "My

friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.”