

Galatians 6:1-16 5th Sunday after Pentecost July 5, 1998

I remember the day my father died. I was living in North Dakota. My Father lived
forty miles from here, near Milan. ^{Ohio} Word came to me on a Monday, my day off. I called
the church to begin to make arrangements for my leaving for the funeral. Shortly
thereafter Duane was knocking at my door.

Duane was the owner and sole employee of a plumbing and heating company.
Until that day I was the one to provide spiritual care for Duane and his family. ^{It} ~~Duane~~ was
^{Ernest} ~~the one~~ I counted on at 1 am on New Years Day when the thermo couple on my
furnace broke and the temperature was fifteen below.

But when Duane came to the door that morning it was not to fix a furnace.

I am sorry to hear about your father, he said.

He embraced me. He listened.

I can't tell you a word Duane said after that - whether he prayed with me or not.

But I will never forget his courage in being a friend that day, a brother in Christ.

Bear one another's burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

~~I don't think Duane was unusual in wanting to help me. What was unusual was~~
~~my being ready to receive his help.~~

~~Bear one another's burdens and in this way fulfill the law of Christ.~~

I remember a gathering here a few years ago. What are you looking for in the
church? was the question everyone was being asked. And around the circle the response
was the same: I want to share the love of Christ with someone.

Everyone said they wanted to give. ^{But} No one said they wanted to receive.

All givers - no receivers

Bear one another's burdens and in this way fulfill the law of Christ.

I remember how it was with me when I first began college. I volunteered. In a nursing home, in a tutoring program in the inner city of Waterloo, Iowa. I had love to give, wisdom to give, Christ to give. But before long I grew discouraged, stopped volunteering. You see, the folks I was so intent on helping did not seem to particularly need nor want my help. I was ready to be the giver, but none of them were very excited about being a receiver.

Bear one another's burdens and in this way fulfill the law of Christ.

One another's burdens.

On whom do you depend in this community of faith? Who depends on you? Who is helping you carry a load? Whose load do you help carry? For whom are you strong? With whom are you weak and vulnerable? Do the roles change? will you let them change?

I think of parents and children. At first all of the giving and supporting and strengthening seems to go in one direction - from parent to child. Guidance, listening, providing all come from the parent, all are received by the child. But then the child is grown and if there is health, a change should occur. Maybe now part of the time when the family goes out to eat the grown child pays for the meal. Maybe now, part of the time the parent is the one who receives advice, receives it gladly.

Then comes the later years - so often years of frustration for everyone when a parent won't receive from the child. Roles now need to be reversed, care and support sacrifice now all coming from the child and received graciously by the parent ~~bearing of~~

~~one another's burdens~~. And listening by the child now taking the role of parent. Careful listening.

Bear one another's burdens and in this way fulfill the law of Christ.

Maybe back in North Dakota Duane was ready to give spiritual support to me all along but it was only when I was brought to my knees by grief that I was able to receive it.

If so I am glad Duane did not give up on me.

Maybe there are others that are ready to give to you and support you and listen to you in this community of faith. What a blessing when you are weak and vulnerable enough to receive ^{in joy} what they would give to you, ~~is given~~.

Today we baptize two young girls. Some Christians think this baptizing of infants and young children rather foolish. They are too young to really understand. Too young to respond.

But I will gladly baptize them for I know that they are weak enough, and small enough and helpless enough to receive. I know that they will always know the truth about God when they are no more powerful than they are this day when whatever happens in them will have to depend on God. When they are older they will probably struggle to prove to God and themselves that they are worthy. But today there is no talk of worthiness, only God's choosing, God's loving, God's promising.

And yet God will one day be proud to be glorified in the love these two girls will share in Christ's name, God will be honored to receive what they give of their material wealth, God will ~~also~~ depend on them to bring others to Christ.

God who has all power and authority will in this way receive from them.

Bear one another's burdens and in this way fulfill the law of Christ.

How I love strength, independence, power. How I hate weakness, dependence, being vulnerable. How strange that God should be known in the cross. In weakness, in being so dependent that he could not even satisfy his own ~~strength~~^{strength} ~~in death~~. How strange that God should be known by me when every confidence in my own power is crucified like Christ and I have nothing to cling to but God. I think it is death. In Christ it is life for me.

Christ bears my burden.

Christ bears your burden.

Thanks be to God.