

In It Together
Galatians 6:1-11
Colebrook Congregational Church
July 3, 2016 / 7th Sunday of Pentecost

Today's selection comes from the conclusion of Paul's Letter to the Galatians, where he has been arguing against a different group of Christians that was trying to undo Paul's evangelical work to the Gentiles, by demanding that the Galatian churches follow Jewish laws and practices.

Paul had set up those churches himself. He put in the time. He started and developed the relationships. And then these other guys just show up, they go into his house, if you will, and start to criticize his work, his efforts. They try to change his house. He could not let that stand.

Piece by piece, Paul attacks and eviscerates the theology of these outsiders. He reminds the Galatians of his relationship with them. And now, in his conclusion to his letter to them, he reminds them that they, him and them, are all in this together.

He tells them, and us, to support one another, help one another, and to restore their spiritual unity with one another. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way, we fulfill the law of Christ.

However, we should not be in each other's business. We test our own works by Christ's standards. We make sure that what we are doing is right, and then help our neighbors as we can, if they falter with their own burdens.

He reminds them, and us, that we all share in good things. And we must be strong, never growing weary of sowing good things, because in doing so, we will reap greater things from the Holy Spirit, for the service and betterment of us all.

I chose to use these verses for the Sunday of Independence Day, because I see in their meaning, a similar spirit in the patriotic actions of the colonists.

We are all in this together:

The Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies was only going to be ratified by a unanimous vote of the assembled delegates. Imagine that, thirteen separate governments agreeing to anything, let alone something as momentous as declaring independence from the mother country. But they managed it. They realized that they were all in this situation together. If they did not, they'd "...be setting brother against brother. That [this] new nation will carry as its emblem the mark of Cain. [They could] see no other way. Either [they] all walk together, or together...stay where [they] are."

Sow good works and reap greatness:

By standing up against tyranny, it is a good work sown. And by doing so, we reap the greatness of freedom and justice for all people. Starting back then, to this age, this spirit has risen again and again to fight against injustices. This spirit has abolished slavery, ended conflict, and secured the equal rights of all people, no matter their ability, gender, race, orientation, or belief system. We hold these truths to self-evident, that we are all created equal, endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights to Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

Bear one another's burdens:

Going hand-in-hand with being in it together; so many communities across the entire Thirteen Colonies worked together to make Independence a reality. Colebrook was among those communities. Colebrook's contribution to the effort was through iron and steel forged by the Rockwells in the central village, and by Richard Smith in the Robertsville borough. Colebrook made various iron tools, and also the critical steel bit used to bore the inside of the weapon's barrels. While many forges in Litchfield County could make iron cannons, they were not ready to be used until they were reamed out with Colebrook's steel bits. Colebrook's forges also made steel rifle and shotgun barrels, most of which were sold to the Armory in Springfield, Massachusetts, this country's primary weapons manufacturer for the U.S. Military at that time. The Effort for Independence could not have succeeded

with just one community. It needed everyone taking part, in some way, and all those pieces coming together to form something great.

We can take these lessons to heart, here in this church and in this community. We should support one another, bear one another's burdens, maintaining our spiritual unity. We must not ever grow weary of sowing our good works, because we will reap great rewards from the Spirit, sharing in all the good things. Remembering always that we are all in this together.

Please join me in the spirit of prayer:

O God, give us strength, so that we not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time, if we do not give up. Help us to see our own works for what they are, making sure that they measure up to Christ's standard. Move us to bear each other's burdens as we are needed and able to do. Inspire us to love our neighbors. And help us to see how we are all in this together. Amen.

Intercessory Prayer

[PAUSE]

God of salvation, who sent Your Son to seek out and save what is lost, hear our prayers on behalf of those who are lost in our day, receiving these petitions and thanksgivings with your unending compassion.

We give You thanks for all the blessings and lessons You have shared with us. May we always approach You and our neighbors with a grateful heart full of Your Love.

Even though You Command us to love our neighbor as ourselves, we create fences around ourselves to keep neighbors outside and tell ourselves it is not our problem, yet we wish it were different. Despite our resistance, we can be assured that You redeem all people, with a love we can never lose no matter how hard we push back, no matter how often we forget, no matter how far we stray. We only need to ask and we are forgiven.

Be with those who are distraught, those who are without, those who know not peace and seek it, those who struggle with addiction, those who are in need, and those who are unwell in mind, body, or spirit. Be with the victims of violence and their loved ones. Help us to comfort them with Your abundant Love. Bless the services of all Your people, and assure them that You are pleased with their work.

We pray that You help lead us through our own trials, the sufferings and sorrows, the challenges and struggles, and back to Your Love. Fill us with hope, sustained in Your mercy, giving us guidance through Your Word, and stamina through Your Spirit.

We especially pray for:

Loving God, open our ears to hear your word and draw us closer to you, that the whole world may be one with you as you are one with us in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Galatians 6:1-11

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. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. For all must carry their own loads. Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher. Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand!

Psalms 66:1-9

66:1 Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;

66:2 sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise.

66:3 Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you.

66:4 All the earth worships you; they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name." Selah

66:5 Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.

66:6 He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot. There we rejoiced in him,

66:7 who rules by his might forever, whose eyes keep watch on the nations-- let the rebellious not exalt themselves. Selah

66:8 Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard,

66:9 who has kept us among the living, and has not let our feet slip.