

Galatians 6:1-5
Bear One Another
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6-25-17

In April of 1945 in the waning days of World War II, Theologian and Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer was sentenced to death for his part in a plot to assassinate Hitler. He and a few other prisoners were loaded into a truck for Berlin from the Flossenberg Camp—deep in the Bavarian Forreest. The journey would take a few days, and along the way he became friends with a Russian Athiest Prisoner named Kokorin. And unlike Bonhoeffer who was known to be unwaveringly hopeful in his faith and resolve, Kokorin had grown deeply discouraged and hopeless. So to pass the time Bonhoeffer asked Kokorin to teach him Russian, and in exchange Bonhoeffer would teach him the basics of the Christian Faith.

When they arrived in Berlin, realizing that help would not come for them in time, the other prisoners asked Bonhoeffer to lead them in a service of worship with communion. But for Kokorin, because he believed that it would be hypocritical to participate in a service for a faith that he did not profess, he chose to go be by himself. Instead of leading the other prisoners, Bonhoeffer refused, choosing instead to sit next to Kokorin, placing his arm around him, because, as he said: if I leave you at the communion table I might actually be leaving Christ behind.

Jesus Christ chose to leave behind his place of honor and privilege to share in the fullness of our human lives—good and bad. In John Chapter one it says that the Word became flesh. Jesus sets aside that place of honor to come and be with you and me. Jesus bore a cross and commanded us to do the same, even if the cross isn't even ours to bear. Sometimes the cross we bear, is the cross that someone else needs us to bear with them.

So, as you are able I invite you to stand with me out of reverence and respect for the Word of God, and listen as I read from Paul's Letter to the Galatians. Here Paul concluding his exhortation to them to be people who live in the freedom of the Spirit. And here we see how the Spirit uniquely equips us to fulfill the fullness of the Law of Christ. And it goes like this...

Brothers and sisters, 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. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ³ For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. ⁵ For each will have to bear his own load.

When Paul wrote this letter, he was speaking to an audience of new Christ-followers in the province of Galatia (modern day Turkey). They had received the gospel and were beginning to apply it to their life and community. But like most new skills, there was a growth curve, and theirs came in the form of a temptation. A temptation to adopt Jewish Practices, which Peter and the Apostles had received word from the Spirit that followers of Christ were no longer subject to. Their law was not circumcision, Sabbath keeping, and acts of Torah observance. In John 13 Jesus says to his disciples **“A new command I give you, that you love one another as I have loved you.”**

This *law of Christ* is a little less concrete, a little more vague and open to interpretation than a series of dos and don'ts. Sometimes we just want to know what the rules are: what's the bare minimum for admission, what can and what can we not do? But that isn't the way to freedom. The path to freedom in Christ leads us to the very limits of our own ability to manage our lives. Sometimes fulfilling the law of Christ means walking off the map.

When I was a senior in college I lived in a townhouse with 10 guys, many of whom had shared a bible study for our 4 years together. Wednesday nights we would get together at 10pm after the studies were finished for the day and we would pray together, read scripture and discuss it together, we would talk about girls together and compare scars from past relationships, and we would contemplate the baby steps to making babies.

One night a friend of ours, Jason, who had been with us from the beginning and had been an outspoken member of the campus ministry, welcoming many new people into our campus ministry. One night Jason was uncharacteristically withdrawn. Finally, one of us noticed and asked what was wrong.

"I don't know where things went off the rails, I haven't prayed in weeks, I don't have any interest in going to church, I try to read my bible but I just feel nothing. I don't know if I even believe this stuff anymore." He went on to tell us about a night we all remembered well, it was the night he gave his powerful testimony at an FCA meeting our freshman year. "All that stuff I said, some of it was true, most of it was made up so that people would accept me. Most of the time I feel like a fraud when I'm around Christians, I just don't know if I can believe right now."

And as we sat in stunned silence that evening, I don't remember who it was, but one of our group members put his arm around Jason's shoulder and said these words: "We love you man, and if you can't believe for yourself right now, we'll believe for you."

But you can't believe for someone, can you? That doesn't sound right. After all we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. That's true. But, take a look at this story from Jesus ministry.

In Mark 2 we read a famous account of a paralytic man, who is carried to Jesus by 4 of his friends. That day so many were gathered in the house with Jesus that they couldn't even broach the front door. So in an act of faithful improvisation, they climbed up on the roof, pulled the thatch roof aside and began to lower their friend down into the presence of Jesus.

And Mark says: when Jesus saw their faith—notice he is not commenting on the faith of the paralytic, but on the faith of his friends—he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." (and went on to heal his paralysis as well.)

This man had a community around him that not only carried his body, but through their faith they carried his hope, his resolve, his faith. They did for him what he could not do for himself.

In our reading this morning it talks about bearing a burden for another, and then in verse 5 goes on to say each must carry their own load. The Greek word for burden is something that no person can carry on their own, a burden is something that would crush a person under its weight. While a load

is different. Think of each person having to carry their own pack, or fulfill their unique duties in an organization.

Do you know what this is like? Have you ever someone, perhaps it was a family member or a friend, who by their choices dragged you into a situation you had no intentions of being in. Or perhaps you were the person doing the dragging. What do you do when you're put in this situation. Do you pity them? Avoid them? Blame them? Expect them to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and clean up their own mess? Were you or the community you were a part of turn out to be more judgmental and critical than the society around you? Or did you seek them out? Show mercy? Inconvenience yourself? Offer assistance when no one else would?

You see the call to bear one another's burdens usually comes in the middle of the night—in other words at the time we least expect it, and are least prepared to deal with it. It doesn't come when we've got a nice convenient opening in our schedule.

You see what I understand when I read Paul's words here is that bearing burdens is always involves placing my life so close to another's life that their reality becomes my own, that their storm becomes my storm. Again, back to Bonhoeffer, this is what he calls Place-Sharing. I may not have the ability to solve your problem, but I will stand here with you and shoulder it alongside while it's ours to shoulder.

And when we do this it says we fulfill the law of Christ, which is the law of love. To be present fully with another, so that they understand that they aren't in this thing alone.

This notion of bearing burdens or place-sharing, has many implications for us to remember, I want to highlight three:

1 Selflessness not self-abandonment.

Author Andrew Root writes: "The life of place-sharing is a life of selflessness; it is overcoming the self-preservation and self-determination of the old humanity and giving the new humanity for others. It does not say, Because I am for you, I have no idea who I am, I have given up my own person to become your person. We don't abandon ourselves when we are for another. Instead it is a Christ-centered selflessness that says: Because I am completely for you, I know concretely who I am; the more I stand in for you the more I know myself."

So first, selflessness is not self-abandonment. We cannot be healers if we abandon the unique Spirit and presence of the living healing Christ within us. Being a place sharer means being for them without becoming them.

2. Choosing messiness of another over the morality of self. Bearing another's burden can place us in the precarious position of: keep my hands clean or risk the messiness of coming along side another. Jesus in becoming human enters the full scope of our lives. And if we fail to see that fact, we will see Christian faith as just a series of musts and ought to's, rather than, like Jesus, becoming incarnate in one another's lives—no matter how messy.

Andrew Root tells a story of a friend who had attended a Christian University, and while there her parents split up. In her grief she turned to smoking and drinking. This was outside the bounds of the lifestyle covenant of her college, but the pain of her parent's disintegrating relationship was deep.

Finally, she explained this to her roommate, hoping that she would help shoulder this burden with her. Instead, the next day she received a phone call from the dean of students requesting a meeting. After a humiliating conversation in which she was chastised for her behavior, she went back to her roommate broken.

Her roommate explained that it was her Christian duty to be a person of integrity. She had to uphold the morals and rules of the school. To which her friend shot back: “You mean to tell me that Jesus is more concerned about morals than me?”

Bearing one another’s burdens embraces this idea that in God’s economy people matter more than piety.

3. Lastly, bearing one another means we’re willing to take the long road of restoration. It is tough to give up our expectations and time frames. And sometimes the needs of another require much more of us than we could ever imagine. And yet it is when we allow ourselves to be drawn into another’s story of healing, we ourselves are healed in the process as well.

Lars and the real girl

Takes place of small MN town cold winter

Lars Lindstrom broken young man 27 sweet kind gentle, lonely, insulated from others.

Mother died while giving birth, father unable to care for him, Gus older brother leaves as soon as he can.

Lars relegated to room out in the garage. Goes about his day quietly, until one day he brings Bianca

Asks Gus and Karen if Bianca can stay with them. But then they meet Bianca, Bianca is a mannequin.

Lars has invented a backstory, missionary raised by nuns, on sabbatical.

But then they bring him to the town doctor and she says the only way to help Lars in this situation is to treat her as real and see Bianca the way Lars sees them. They’re all going to laugh at him, they’re going to laugh at you.

Share in Lars’ burden and help carry him back to reality. But they realize that if this is going to work they are going to need a lot more help, they’re going to need back up by family friends and the entire community. So they go meet with the minister and elders of the church.

You need not wonder what you’re to do, because the Lord has told you what you are to do. Love one another.

Lars with all of his brokenness and awkwardness is welcome in Church with Bianca.

Flowers and invitations to parties, members of the church wash her and dress her, members of the congregation find Bianca jobs and volunteer opportunities, to help ween Lars off of her. As Bianca’s schedule gets more and more busy, and Lars is interacting more and more with people in the community

Karen clip. 1:06:08-1:08:57

Shortly after this Lars is able to let go of Bianca, see it at a funeral for Bianca.

This is a parable of how the community of Christ is to bear a burden of another and restore one another to Christ. This is end of the process of bearing, restoration, welcome back to love, life, wholeness,

Do we love one another enough to walk with each other through sometimes long, sometimes challenging, sometimes painful restoration

When we're carrying one another we don't have to be burdened with knowing the answers, we just need to be willing to walk with one another.