

## *Do not grow weary.*

*Psalm 66:1-9; Galatians 6:1-16*

Do not grow weary of doing the right thing. This is Paul's message to the Galatians today. So even amid crisis and turmoil Paul is calling the people of the region of Galatia to strive to live in faithful service with gratitude, humility, compassion and love. It is said that we reap what we sow. We are called to sow in the Spirit; in a spirit of generosity for all of creation. What does it mean to live by the spirit and to be guided by the Spirit? How do we know that we are being guided by this spirit and not a spirit of greediness as one of our children pointed out? How do we know we are doing the right thing?

One of the best ways to do this is to discern; to spend time listening for God, listening for God's spirit which is directing each of us. In the words of William Harkens it is well documented that: "under stress any family system, churches included, may resort to infighting and engage in behaviour based on difference which often results in emphasis not on theological virtues and practices, but rather on divisions more reflective of the society at large. Rigid interpretations of law rather than expressions of faith informed by the pastoral virtue and spirit of compassion."<sup>1</sup>

In order to be guided by the spirit and live by the spirit, we have some work to do. We need to engage in our faith. We need to practice our faith. We need to be disciplined in the same way that we are about our health and our fitness. The food choices we make, the exercise we choose to do, the routines we have created to help us find balance in our life. The same can be said about our faith. According to Paul there's several things we need to do in order to live in the spirit. One: we need to work for the good of all. We need to bear one another's burdens. And at the same time, we are called to carry our own load. We need to remember that we will reap what it is we sow. If that wasn't enough, Paul implores us to not grow weary in doing what is right in the spirit of gentleness. This is a tough balancing act. How do I bear other people's loads when I can barely bear my own? How do I find a way to restore someone who has gone off the path with gentleness, especially when I am being yelled at or blamed? We need to get back to the basics. We need to focus on the core of what we believe and value. In other words, we need to turn our attention to God's call or the core of Jesus' message which is to love one another.

There is a book that I often return to for guidance to get me back on track in my faith. It is called

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<sup>1</sup> William Harkens, *Feasting on the Word* Year C, Volume 3, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, p. 208.

*Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church* by Michael W. Foss. In this book Foss provides the readers with six practices of discipleship: daily prayer, weekly worship, bible reading, service, spiritual friendship and giving. The first three, daily prayer, weekly worship, and bible reading are tools that help us to be filled and strengthened. These are the practices that prepare us to then serve others, be in spiritual friendship and finally give for the good of all. And it seems straight forward on the surface, but when we become stressed, overwhelmed, depressed, angry or hurt our natural tendency is to turn off, to lash out, to be tempted and to grow weary of what is right. We forget what it is to forgive, to start from a place of grace and to enter a dialogue and to come to a mutual understanding in a spirit of gentleness. So, let's look at these six practices.

Prayer is one practice that as a minister I get the most questions about. When people are asked to pray, they often respond by saying, I don't really know how. I wouldn't be very good at this. Foss on the other hand assures us that prayer is simply doing what we already know how to do, but we are doing it with God as the one to who we are speaking and listening to. Prayer is simply talking to each other, sharing our needs with the people who care for us and who can help us. Prayer is the giving and receiving of information, asking for things, expressing gratitude, saying we are sorry and asking for forgiveness. Expressing what is important to us and speaking words of love and listening to others. There is no right or wrong way of praying. All you must do is have a conversation with God, but that is not enough.

We are also called to worship weekly in an ideal world. It is important to be part of a faith community. The reason being that when we gather as believers we have that in common. When we come together, we break bread together, bringing us to a place of understanding and healing and most importantly, reconciliation. Having a faith community as a place where we can share our faith. Where others will understand and be inspired. This is a place where we are nurtured and strengthened and where we refocus back on God. A place where we encounter God.

The third piece was bible reading. The bible really is the disciples' key tool. It is a place where teachings are found, it's a place that causes us to reflect and question, it's a place where we can find words of comfort and inspiration or challenge. Where we are reminded of God's promises for us and what it means to be in a covenanted relationship with God. Really the Bible is a library of stories about how God is at work in the world. It is the accounts of Jesus' teachings and an alternative way of being in a relationship with one another. So, through these three practices we are given direction, strength purpose and understanding so that we can engage in service, spiritual friendship and giving.

How many of you have ever been on an airplane? Many, many of you, good. We are repeatedly told when we get on the airplane that we need to put our own oxygen mask on first before we can assist others. That is what prayer, weekly worship and reading the Bible is about; we are putting our own oxygen mask on so that we can ensure that we are ready and able to serve and help others. So now that we have prayed and we have worshipped together and we have been inspired

and learned from the Bible, we are called to then serve. Service begins at home, in our workplace and our community. God calls us to serve one another. When Jesus knelt at the feet of the disciples and washed their feet, he was serving the disciples even though he was their leader. In that act of caring for them in a time when he knew what was to come. He served them because he was called by God and that was his way of showing love. Service is the call to share our gifts and to share God's love with others, to share God's message of hope. God also calls us to be in relationship with one another. Spiritual friendship is the best kind of friendship we can have. Spiritual friendship is both an honour and a gift. When we have a spiritual friend, not only are we invited to walk with them. They hold us and we hold them accountable to what we believe and what we value. Our spiritual friends are the ones that say is that what you really meant to do and say, or would you maybe want to try this. Do you remember when you said you would pray everyday? How's it going? That is what spiritual friends are about. Holding us accountable to what God has called us to do. Our spiritual friends help us to restore ourselves when we get off track in the spirit of gentleness and sometimes tough love.

And finally, we are called to give; to share what we have for the good of all. Paul's message to the Galatians says that it doesn't matter if you were circumcised or not. All that matters is that your faith makes you love others. Paul believes that the gospel will produce congregations in which unity exists with amazing diversity. A new creation is everything. And the only way we can create a new creation is when we all come together and share in it. So, we are called today to open our hearts to our diversity, trust that God can bring us together and hold in tension that which would otherwise divide us. So, I hope and pray that our love can be our common purpose and goal. I hope and pray that we will not grow weary of doing what is right and that we will help one another in a spirit of gentleness so that we can truly live and love one another as we would be loved.

I want to share with you a different version of the Psalm we heard today. Listen to it with new ears. Everyone on Earth praise you God of all Creation and you should too. You are awesome and everything you do is stupendous. Because of your strength armies stand down and the beauty of Creation buds forth singing about you. Come everyone and see the tremendous things our God has done. Miracles. Seas turned to dry land and those seeking freedom cross over to new life. Keep praising God. Let no one who seeks harm find their way to us. Get the good news out. God has brought us relief from our worst selves and from the forces that wish us dead. God promises good things for us and God delivers, and may God add blessings to these Holy readings. Amen.