

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

“Let Us Not Grow Weary of Doing Good”

Galatians 6:1-10, 14-16

It's said that it took Winston Churchill three years to get through the eighth grade because, believe it or not, he had trouble with English. It's somewhat ironic, then, that some years later Oxford asked him to speak at its commencement exercises. He arrived with his usual props – a cigar, a cane and a top hat. As he approached the podium, the crowd rose in appreciation and applause. He motioned for them to be seated and when they had quieted down, he removed the cigar from his mouth and carefully placed his top hat on the podium. And then he began. With quiet authority, he said, “Never give up!” Several seconds passed and then he said once again, “Never give up!” A profound silence fell upon the crowd as he reached for his hat, put his cigar back in his mouth and descended the speaker's stand, cane in hand. And as he did, the crowd erupted into thunderous applause.

Churchill's six word commencement speech was, no doubt, the shortest commencement speech ever delivered at Oxford but, by many accounts, it was the best. It's said that every person there that day probably remembered that six word speech for the rest of their life.

Such is the stuff of today's epistle lesson from Galatians. You may remember that Paul opened the letter to the Christians in Galatia by reminding them of the Gospel – that is, the Good News of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone – the Gospel which he had preached to them in the beginning and the Gospel which they believed but, now, the Gospel from which they had wandered to embrace what he called a “different gospel which is no gospel at all.” He then went on to call them back to the true Gospel and, now in this closing chapter of his letter, he encourages them to hold fast to that Gospel and to not grow weary of doing good – that is, to never give up the faith and to the living out of that faith again. For after all, he says, a man harvests what he sows and if we don't give up we will reap a harvest – a harvest to eternal life. It's not unlike another analogy that Paul used elsewhere when he likened the Christian faith and life to a race – not a short dash but a marathon. We need to throw off all that weighs us down and would hold us back from completing the race, he says, and run the race to its completion if, indeed, we expect to win the crown.

Paul's words of encouragement to the Christians in Galatia are as timely today to Christians like you and me as they were to the Galatians two thousand years ago – not only his call to stay faithful to the Gospel but also to not give up or grow weary of doing good, that is, to continue to be faithful to living out that Gospel until the end.

The fact is that, like the Galatians, we are often tempted to neglect or forget the Gospel and, in the process, to grow tired of living it out. And even when we don't neglect or forget the Gospel, we may be tempted to grow weary anyway and to give up. I've been a pastor for thirty-seven years now and I can say without fear of contradiction that there is nothing sadder or more disheartening than for a pastor to see people – some of whom have been Christians since they

were baptized as an infant – give up, give up believing, give up living out their faith, give up doing good.

I can think of several examples from previous parishes. One is those who gave up little by little. Oh, they used to worship every week but then it was every other week and then it was once a month and then once a quarter and then just on holidays. Oh, they used to go to Sunday school and Bible class but they got older and busier or interested in other things and didn't go any more. Oh, they used to give but unfortunately they had other places to put their money now. And they used to serve too but they've decided they've done enough and now it's someone else's job. And they used to fellowship with their brothers and sisters in Christ but now they have other friends that they spend their time with.

The second example is those who give up all of a sudden. They are those who for whatever reason, perhaps because they just got mad at God for something they think He did or didn't do or perhaps they got mad at the pastor or someone else in church or perhaps they became frustrated or discouraged or something and just quit over night.

Giving up, growing weary of doing good, hurts not only the individual but the church as well because we run the risk of not only losing faith but also because the church's witness is compromised and her effectiveness in reaching out to those around is diminished.

I'm reminded of Robert Morrison who was one of the first Protestant missionaries to China. He worked there for seven years before he baptized the first convert and during his twenty-seven years of service he baptized only ten. But, in the end, they were the first fruits of a greater harvest that was still to come. And all because he did not grow weary in doing good.

So, too, if we do not grow weary, God promises a greater harvest both for us and for His Church not only in this world but also in the world to come. As one of my professors at the seminary liked to say, "God doesn't call you to be successful. He just calls you to be faithful." The beauty of that is, of course, that when we are faithful, when we don't give up, when we don't grow weary of doing good, when we don't quit, God crowns our efforts with success anyway – for Jesus' sake. Remember, the Bible doesn't say that on the last day God will say, "Well done, thou good and successful servant." It says He will say, "Well done thou good and faithful servant."

May God refresh us with the Good News of our continuing forgiveness and the new life and salvation that we have in Christ Jesus again today and may He strengthen us through Word and Sacrament so that we may not grow weary in doing good now or ever. Remember, "never give up!" In Jesus' name. Amen.