

**Swimming Together in Kingdom Currents  
while Bearing the Burdens of Weaker Swimmers  
David Jahnke based on Gal. 6:1-10, 7/17/16**

This is the last of a sermon series on Galatians. I started wondering about how the Galatians came to believe and what Paul was actually preaching. He always preached the saving death and resurrection of Jesus. He probably included his own conversion in many of his sermons; how he had been persecuting the church until Jesus appeared to him and told him there was a new way for him to follow— one of blessing rather than cursing Gentiles, sinners and heretics.

In the book of Acts, we learn that Paul preached to wisdom-loving Greeks at the Areopagus. And he affirmed how their poets and artists and philosophers were right about some important things. There was a sculpture to the unknown God. And Paul told them that what was previously unknown had been made known in Jesus. In his discussions with them, he would have agreed that Plato was right about a heavenly realm and ideal forms there. And from that heaven, God had sent a man to reveal and judge the world according to heavenly ideals. And we know that because of how he lived, his message, miracles and most importantly because he was raised from the dead. And those ideals surround and fill us just as your poets said, ‘In God we live and move and have our being.’ Your poets were also right that human beings are God’s offspring. And we met one particular Son of God who shows us how to live as God’s children.”

Many of the Greeks found this quite interesting and wanted to hear more. Just as Paul affirmed their religious and moral inclinations, we should do the same. People have this sense of innate sense of right and wrong and love and hate and good and evil and forgiveness and revenge. But most are not sure where this comes from or why or what to do with it. So we first affirm their connections to God through art and morality and science and other religions. And then we build from there.

I started reading the 20<sup>th</sup> century great Jewish philosopher and theologian Abraham Heschel who speaks of living and moving and having our being in God.

The ineffable [the thing that is too great to be described]; it is not a particular puzzle to the mind, as, for example, the cause of volcanic eruptions. We do not

have to go to the end of reasoning to encounter the ineffable. It is something we are confronted with everywhere and at all times. The force that inspires readiness for self-sacrifice, the thoughts that breed humility...; the purity of which we never cease to dream, the untold things we insatiably love, the vision of the good...— [all of these things] no reason can bound. It is the ineffable from which we draw the taste of the sacred, the joy of the imperishable. [Heschel, Man is Not Alone]

Heschel is pointing out that we are all swimming in the great mystery of God. Either he or another philosopher James Smith who I am reading gave the illustration of some young fish approaching an older one who asks them how the water is that way. And they ask, “What is water?”

God so pervades everything— the air we breathe and good thoughts we think and love and joy we feel and share—; God’s enveloping presence makes us like young fish who cannot envision the thing that surrounds and fills them.

But we do not simply live, move and have our being in God. We are also shaped by the powers and principalities of a fallen world.

The spiritual river has currents going in both directions. The main current taking us downstream brings joy and excitement and hope and beauty and newness and will win the day while the other sends us spinning toward rocks and whirlpools.

And the job of parents and Christians and good-hearted people everywhere is to make known these deep underlying currents and show and teach children how to swim and float in the current of Life and Love and Peace.

I have another illustration from my boys and their camping excursions. After Seth enjoyed electronics on his way home from camp after being away from them for a week, he and Dietrich decided to have a no-electronics contest. And for five days, they were wrestling and joking and playing with actual physical toys; and, in general, there was a vibrancy and joy that is not always there.

The fast is over but the impact remains. And this came primarily from both boys’ camping experience. They got into the current of the Kingdom while back in God’s creation and away from all of the distractions and temptations of the modern world. They had a Sabbath from all of that. And they learned how to bear with and rejoice in others face to face.

If ever there was a time when we needed to re-learn bearing with and rejoicing in one another, it is now. Parents and children; husbands and wives; fellow church members; Muslims, Jews and Christians; blacks and whites; police and citizens; democrats and republicans.

And we learn to rejoice and bear with each other primarily through face-to-face relationship building-- through Sabbath time together in nature or over meals or my personal favorite, playing board games together. Have you seen any of the videos of police officers dancing around with those they serve during parades or hugging Black Lives Matter protesters? It is time to start reaching out and affirming the “other” who seems to be against us or a threat. In almost all situations, they are not! And our fear keeps us from doing the good for all that Paul calls us to.

Paul was all about breaking down barriers among Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, males and females. He demanded that all fellowship together in the grace that comes with knowing God has saved us all. The saving grace of God vs. the condemnation of the Law was less about human imperfection and more about spiritual fellowship among peoples with different laws and roles and how grace alone makes us one with God and each other.

That said, the Law of Christ does indeed reveal everyone’s imperfections. And that is meant to humble us and lead us again to fellowship because we know that just as God bears with us, so must we bear with each other. Sin will try and beat us down, just as it did to Jesus and the disciples. But they kept rising up and doing good for all because they knew the forgiveness of sins and the promise of everlasting life.

And that is what Paul demands of us-- stopping two things: 1. First, thinking we are good enough or better than others. Those lead to spiritual lethargy when it comes to our own work and estrangement from those who are not good enough. 2. Second, wallowing in our own victimhood, brokenness and presumed inabilities. To some the message was, “Humble yourself in order to serve! Bear the burdens of others.” To others, “Rise up in order to serve! And carry your own load!” Take advantage of every opportunity to do good for anyone and everyone, but especially for Christians around you when called upon.

This is essentially about forming Christian character. N.T. Wright puts it this way:

"Character is a slowly forming thing. You can no more force character on someone than you can force a tree to produce fruit when it isn't ready to do so. The person has to choose, again and again, to develop the moral muscles and skills which will shape and form the fully flourishing character."

And the church is here to help you choose to develop those muscles. How did the kids build character and get in tune with God? By a Sabbath week at camp! And here you are today on the Sabbath building up your spiritual muscles for the sake of doing good: 1. for you and yours, 2. for the family of faith and ultimately, 3. for all.

So as we conclude this sermon series, you know you have been completely freed from every judgment and obligation and sin and fear and anxiety. So what will you do with your new self? It's like hearing news from your doctor that the cancer which harmed and haunted every aspect of your being is no longer there. Will you go back to the lifestyle that brought on the cancer in the first place? Or will you choose to eat good spiritual food and exercise and rejoice in every day? It takes time but the payoffs are so worth it. Both Spirit and flesh are calling. Choose the Spirit and build you and yours up in goodness that will just keep expanding in your personal life and the worlds you inhabit.

