

RESTORATION

Galatians 6:1-18

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (Series C)

July 3, 2022

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran Church, Buxton, ND

The epistle lesson for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost comes from *Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, chapter 6, verses 1 through 18. Please stand as you are able for God's Holy Word. From Galatians 6, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

¹ Brothers, 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.

⁶ Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. ⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. ⁹ And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. ¹⁰ So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

¹¹ See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. ¹² It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³ For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. ¹⁴ But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. ¹⁶ And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

¹⁷ From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

I remember a few times while I was growing up, when I did not want my dad to come home. It was probably more than just a few times, but there are a few times that I remember not wanting him to come home. And it's not because *he* did anything wrong, but because *I* had done something wrong. And my dad didn't know it yet, but when he got home, he would find out. Either my mom would tell him, or he would just see the evidence of it. Or, and this probably happened a few times, my sister would be gleefully waiting to tell him what I had done.

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Now, I wasn't really a trouble maker as a kid. But I also wasn't as good as everyone thought. I kind of just knew how to stay out of trouble. I knew how far I could go without getting into trouble, and I also knew how to frame my brother. But there were a handful of times when I did something wrong, and I could not hide it, and I could not talk my way out of it.

I'll tell you about one of those times. I was playing with a soccer ball. And I was trying to see how many times in a row I could kick it over the house like a punter. So I'd start in the backyard and kick it over the house. Then I'd run around to the front yard and kick it over the house. Then I'd run to the backyard and kick it over the house. Over and over again, back and forth. And I knew I should not be doing this. I don't remember how I knew this. Maybe I knew what could happen, or maybe my dad had seen me doing this the day before and told me not to do it. I don't remember. Either way, the inevitable happened. The point of contact between my foot and the ball dropped, causing the launch angle of the ball to also drop, and physics caused the ball to sail straight into the dining room window. Crash. Immediately, I felt shame. It wasn't really guilt. There's a difference between guilt and shame. Guilt is pain over what you have done. But shame is pain over how someone else sees you. And I wasn't really afraid of punishment either. It was really just shame. I didn't want my dad to be disappointed with me.

There's something about dads. I don't know if this is true for girls. I think it is. But I know this is true for boys. We don't want to disappoint our dads. I've even heard men who have never met their fathers say that they're still afraid of disappointing them. I can't really explain this, but at least for the other guys here, I don't have to explain it. You know what I'm talking about. The last person in the world that a boy wants to disappoint is his own father.

And this isn't really fair for moms. It means that their discipline is not as effective as a father's discipline. My mom could threaten the same consequences, and she could execute the same consequences as my dad, but I didn't care nearly as much. Discipline from my mom was more like a transaction. It was just the price I had to pay for doing what I wanted. So there were times when she would threaten a consequence. Then I would weigh the cost and say to myself, "That's worth it." But discipline from my dad, that made me feel shame. And it's not like my dad ever tried to shame me. I just didn't want to disappoint him.

So I broke this window, and I immediately felt shame, because I knew this was something my dad would deal with instead of my mom.

And I should say, this was far from the worst thing I did. In fact, as I look back on it, I don't think it was a big deal at all. I think every boy should have the experience of breaking a window. It's good for them. It has to be an accident, of course. If you do it on purpose, that's cheating. But every boy should make up enough outside games that he eventually breaks a window. It's just part of being a boy. So this was far from the worst thing I did. And that's really why I picked this story; I don't really want to tell you the other stories.

But this was enough to make me feel shame. So I didn't even go in the house. I didn't want to be there when my dad came home. So, if I remember correctly, I think this was the time that I hid in the garden. We had raspberry bushes and other shrubs back there. They were big enough for a boy to hide in, or at least think that he's hiding. So I literally hid in the garden.

I'm not the first person to hide in the garden. It's actually a very human reaction when we feel shame. Adam and Eve were the first persons to think of this. They didn't want God to find them. They didn't want God to see them in their shame. So they "hid themselves from the LORD God among the trees of the garden" (Gen. 3:8). But God, mercifully, did not do what they wanted. He came and found them. He sought them out so that he could restore them to himself. Now, he did give them consequences. He removed them from the garden, which was actually for

their own good. But, more importantly, he promised to send a Savior, and he set his salvation plan in motion. God came to restore them. He came to set things right.

My dad also found me. There was no way I could hide from him. He was always going to find me. And when he did, I don't think he even punished me. I don't remember any punishment, anyway. But I do know that he fixed the window. That's what dads do. They fix things. And I don't just mean windows, but relationships too. As long as that window was broken, I had shame. But when that window was fixed, my shame was gone. My dad found me, and he fixed the whole thing.

That's really what justice means. When we're caught in sin, we fear justice. And sometimes we define justice too narrowly as simply getting what we deserve. That's fairness. Fairness is when everyone gets what they deserve. Fairness is when everyone is rewarded according to their deeds or punished according to their sins. But fairness is not the same thing as justice. Sometimes justice and fairness overlap, but they're not the same thing. The word "justice" really means "rightness" or "righteousness." In Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and probably a bunch of other languages too, "justice" and "rightness" are the same word. Justice means doing the right thing or making things right. Sometimes we do the right thing by giving fair rewards and fair punishments. This is the way government functions. A just government gives fair rewards and fair consequences. But fairness is only one of the ways justice can be manifested. Justice can also be manifested in mercy and forgiveness. In this kind of justice, someone like a father or God himself makes things right. This is really merciful, and it's usually not fair.

In order to manifest justice, that is, in order to make things right, that window needed to get fixed. The fair thing would have been for my dad to say, "You broke it, you fix it." That would be fair, but it could never make things right, because I didn't know how to fix the window. And if I had tried, I would have failed, and I probably would have hurt myself. The only way to make things right, the only way to make our house just again, was for him to take responsibility for it. That is the gracious manifestation of justice.

Perhaps you can see how this relates to the Christian faith. Our first parents corrupted this world by sinning against God's command. It broke everything. It brought pain, violence, sin, and death into the world. The fair thing would have been for God to say, "You broke it; you fix it. And if you can't, you have to pay the price." But they, of course, could not do that. They didn't have the power. They had the power to destroy, but like a young boy, they did not have the power to restore. So if God had chosen to be fair, justice would never be possible. In order for God to have justice, he has to fix it himself. He has to make things right. And that's what he did by sending his own Son in human flesh. He suffered the curse of sin and death for us. We could not bear that curse and live, because we have continued in the same rebellion as our first parents. But the Son of God, Jesus Christ, was pure. His life was pure enough, and his life was valuable enough, to pay the redemption price for us. And he was powerful enough that the grave could not hold him in death. So he bore the curse for our sake, so that we would be restored as God's children.

This is God's justice. God did everything necessary to fix what we have broken. He restored our relationship to him. So we have no reason to feel any shame. God sees you through the righteousness of his Son, Jesus Christ. That's what he sees when he looks at you. Remember, shame is pain over the way someone else sees you. But God sees you through the righteousness of Jesus, so you have no reason to feel any shame. But we still do feel shame, because we still see what we have done. We still see the way we are in our sinful flesh.

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This, I imagine, must be the most frustrating thing for God. He has removed our sin. He has removed our cause for shame. But we still live in this shame. And it makes us hide from God. We're hiding from the one who removed our shame. I don't know if God experiences frustration. We know he has emotions, but they're somewhat different from ours. His greatest emotion is compassion. That's the pity or mercy that he feels for us. The Bible also talks about joy, anger, and jealousy. Human beings are created in the image of God. Part of that image of God is that we experience emotions, as God does. But we experience these emotions in a sinful or selfish way. But God experiences them in a pure and selfless way. He feels anger or jealousy when those he loves are consumed by evil. So when we talk about God being an emotional being, we should remember that his emotions are pure. For us, frustration is a feeling of weakness or powerlessness. We get frustrated when things don't work the way we want them to, and we are powerless to fix it. That's frustration. God, of course, is not powerless. But we can certainly say that he feels sorrow when things are not right. And, especially, it's sorrow over the fact that those he loves have hidden their eyes from him, so they do not see his love. It must be painful, because he has removed our shame, and he has told us that he has removed our shame, and he has promised to forgive us when we confess our sin, but we refuse to see it. We refuse to hear it. Our shame leads us to hide from God, and for no reason. He can see us the whole time, but we hide from him and turn our faces away from him. We're like little toddlers who think their parents can't see them when they cover their own eyes. But that only causes us to not see God. God can see right through our appearances. He can see the depravity inside. But he chooses to see us through the righteousness of Jesus instead. And he gives that righteousness to you as a pure gift. The frustrating thing is that we don't feel that until we get past our feelings of shame.

That's why Paul says, "If anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness" (6:1). That's the point of all this. "Restore him in a spirit of gentleness."

As Christians, we do not ignore sin. In the last chapter, just a few verses before this, Paul talks about "sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these" (5:19-21). And the rest of the Bible has even more to say about sin. So we do not ignore sin. Ignoring sin leaves it unsolved. Instead, we restore those who are caught in sin. We remove shame by forgiving sins.

This is different than how the world deals with shame. And by "world" I mean the collective sinful natures of all of us. The world deals with shame in one of two ways: condemnation or denial. The world condemns sin in other people, so that we can feel better about ourselves. This is one of the ways we try to resolve our shame. We say, "At least I'm not as bad as that guy." The other thing the world does is deny sin. The world tries to solve the shame problem by pretending that the sin that caused the shame isn't really a sin. This is our failed attempt to remove the cause of shame. We redefine sin as a virtue, and then we take pride in it.

But as Christians, we do not ignore sin. We do not redefine sin. We do not even condemn sin. Only God can condemn. We forgive, because this is, ultimately, what God has done with all sin. He condemned it in the flesh of Jesus, so that he can forgive us.

When someone comes to restore us, it can feel like condemnation at first. As soon as they acknowledge that we have sinned, we feel condemned, and we feel shame. But anyone who truly comes in the name of Jesus, does not come to condemn. They come to restore.

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This is what God does with us, and he sends people, other people, to proclaim it to us. He did not leave us alone in our shame. He does not allow us to hide from him. If he did, we would die in our shame. But he came to find us and restore us. Jesus took our shame upon himself. He wore that shame. Others looked at him as a criminal worthy of death. And he died that way. That was your shame, but it was placed on Jesus. He suffered, died, and rose again to fix what we have broken. This is how God enacted justice. And this is how you are restored. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.