

## **Pentecost #7**

7/3/16

Galatians 6:1-16

J.V. Trautwein

Tomorrow we will celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, the 240<sup>th</sup> birthday of our country. Over this extended weekend we will throw an elaborate party spending over 3 billion dollars on parties, food, entertainment and travel. There will be some 36 million barbecues, picnics and cookouts costing around 2 billion dollars. To highlight the festivities the American people will spend some 600 million dollars on fireworks and attend some 14,000 organized local displays. The Fourth is without a doubt one of the largest and most expensive birthday parties of the year. It is celebrated in the name of freedom, equality, and liberty as well as, in honor of those who have contributed to the formation of this country.

We celebrate in spite of the fact that our history has been a struggle to achieve the lofty goals set out by the founding fathers. After all freedom, equality, and liberty have not been for everybody over these 234 years but has been slowly evolving. For nearly half of these years we were involved in slavery and its resulting racism. In fact, throughout these many years we have not been immune from prejudice, greed, exploitation, inequality, and corruption. We celebrate in spite of being one of the most violent developed countries in the world. In 2014 nationally we had 14,249 murders. When compared with our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan during which we have experienced a total of 6,785 US military personnel killed, the domestic murder rate becomes highly disturbing. Some would say that is the cost of freedom and to an extent maybe so.

But, we do not celebrate the negatives of the past and present but what we do celebrate is the ability to learn from our past, experience forgiveness, correct our mistakes, share the burdens which the past may have cost, and help each other to seek a better tomorrow. We celebrate the goals upon which our exemplary constitution incorporated. Hopefully, these goals will continue to lead the nation to their fulfillment. If not, the people as a nation will, have little to celebrate.

This is true within the church also. Every Sunday we celebrate being a part of the Body of Christ. We as individuals and collectively may or may not live up to what being a member of the Body of Christ means. We all fall short in one way or another from time to time. This of course is the nature of being human. It has been said that "The church is a hospital for sinners and not a hotel for saints." It is so easy to fall into the category of thinking the church as the hotel. I can remember many years ago I knew a man who thought that beginning the worship service with confession was all too negative and irrelevant since he didn't see any sin within himself. He was perfectly fine as he was; he never did anything wrong. With such an attitude, beyond reality, he would fall into the category of being above everybody else, that is unless he didn't see the wrongs which other people did also. Of course, that was not the case; everybody else had difficulty doing what was right in his eyes. This is blind self righteousness. By the way, often patriotism can fall into this trap also and become blind patriotism.

Paul has something to say about this. He acknowledges the reality of sin and wrongdoing within people and within the Body of Christ. He also recognizes that it is the responsibility of each of us to help each other to come to reconciliation and forgiveness. "My friends," he writes, "if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness." Notice he did not say this restoration is through condemnation and self righteousness but through gentleness. Restoration is by way of the path of God's love through grace. Little is gained through condemnation except maybe the false inflation of ego of the condemner. Paul warns about any other way than love and gentleness, "For if those who are nothing think that are something they deceive themselves." To Paul not to have this love of Christ amounts to a life filled with nothing, an empty life. "Take care that you yourselves are not

tempted.” That is, tempted to take the route of placing yourself above others. Instead he states, “Bear one another’s burden, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

To bear one another’s burdens places everybody on an equal footing helping each other through the struggles of life. These struggles are not just overcoming the mistakes which are made in life but helping each other when life trials and tragedies strike. This is most certainly true within and among the members of the church but it also extends beyond the confines of the fellowship into the world in which we live. Love knows no boundaries and is lived throughout life. Forgiveness breaks the bonds of condemnation in all of life and fulfills the love of God. Being a Christian does not mean that we lord it over everybody who is not. God’s love does not include arrogance but is fulfilled with gentleness, kindness, and example. Paul again states, “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit.”

It sounds so easy, but being human as we are, what sounds easy is very deceiving. Some say all you need to do is be born again or to be saved and then the way is cleared for you. Perhaps there is some truth in this in so far as there is a commitment to live this love of God but it does not allow us to escape our humanity or as Paul states it, the flesh. We are still in need of each other in the Body of Christ. We are still in need of sharing each other’s burdens out of God’s love. We are still in need of humility and not arrogance. We are still in need of compassionate giving to the world in which we live. We are still in need of following the law of Christ – love God and love your neighbor as yourself. We are still in need of God’s grace, His love and forgiveness. As long as we have breath in the flesh we must strive to understand that we are brothers and sisters in God’s family of love and must share life as though we are just that, brothers and sisters.

This is a life-long road we are traveling which can be overtaken by weariness and failures. In recognition of this Paul writes, “So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.” Fulfilling this then gives us the cause to celebrate. Every time we lift each other up in order to overcome the pitfalls and trials of life we have cause to celebrate. Every time we extend forgiveness we experience God’s love. Alexander Pope, the 18<sup>th</sup> century English poet put it this way, “To err is human, to forgive is divine.”

If we live the lessons of equality through God’s love, of forgiving one another, of sharing each other’s burdens, then the Body of Christ not only lives but this life in Christ will help our nation to someday realize the fulfillment of the goals and the principals which our founding fathers set forth. It is this commitment that we renew and celebrate not only today but everyday of our lives; especially when we join our lives together in the Body of Christ.