

“A New Creation is Everything”
Galatians 6:1-16
Sunday, July 10, 2016
The Rev. Sharon Snapp-Kolas, preaching

Scripture. Prayer.

Opening.

The Apostle Paul writes, “May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 14). But boasting is a common human behavior, isn’t it? We boast about our children and our grandchildren. We boast about our work. We boast when our favorite team wins. We boast about the places we’ve been and the things we’ve done, showing pictures to whoever will pause to look at them. On the Fourth of July we boast about our nation and the pride we have in our heritage of freedom.

The story is told of an American who was staying in London. He was introduced to a man from Edinburgh, Scotland.

The Scotchman asked him, “An’ what country do you belong tae?”

“The greatest country in the world!” replied the American.

“Mon! So dae I,” replied the Scotsman, “but you donna speak like a Scotsman.”

Paul insists that nothing matters except our citizenship in God’s new creation. In fact, asserts Paul, we ourselves are new creations, having died with Christ and been raised with him to new life.

Today we wrap up our study of Paul’s letter to the Galatians. In chapter 6 he revisits the major themes of his letter. He shares his vision of the Christian community: They should be a group of people who bear one another’s burdens. He tells them how they can become this new creation of caring folks. He begins by reminding the Galatians to test their own work; don’t

worry about what their neighbor is doing.

I. Don't take someone else's inventory. (vv. 1-6)

In v. 4 Paul writes: "All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride." He continues in v. 5: "For all must carry their own loads." We are to focus on what we're doing, and let God worry about what the other guy is doing.

This goes for spiritual work as well as our daily tasks. We grade ourselves on our own spiritual progress. We do not point out our neighbor's faults in order to make ourselves feel superior. This is Paul's point.

Former televangelist Jim Bakker writes about how the Graham family did just that for him. They ignored his faults at a very difficult time in his life, just after his release from prison.

Bakker writes:

"When I was transferred to my last prison, Franklin [Graham] said he wanted to help me out when I got out -- with a job, a house to live in, and a car. It was my fifth Christmas in prison. I thought it over and said, 'Franklin, you can't do this. It will hurt you. The Grahams don't need my baggage.' He looked at me and he said, 'Jim, you were my friend in the past and you are my friend now. If anyone doesn't like it, I'm looking for a fight.'

"So when I got out of prison the Grahams sponsored me and paid for a house for me to live in and gave me a car to drive. The first Sunday out, Ruth Graham called the halfway house I was living in at the Salvation Army and asked permission for me to go to the Montreat Presbyterian Church with her that Sunday morning. When I got there, the pastor welcomed me and sat me with the Graham family. There were like two whole rows of them -- I think every Graham aunt and uncle and cousin was there. The organ began playing and the place was full

except for a seat next to me. Then the doors opened and in walked Ruth Graham. She walked down that aisle and sat next to inmate 07407-058. I had only been out of prison 48 hours, but she told the world that morning that Jim Bakker was her friend.

“Afterwards, she had me up to their cabin for dinner. When she asked me for my addresses, I pulled this envelope out of my pocket to look for them. In prison you're not allowed to have a wallet, so you just carry an envelope. She asked, ‘Don't you have a wallet?’ And I said, ‘Well, yeah, this is my wallet.’ After five years of brainwashing in prison you think an envelope is a wallet. She walked into the other room and came back and said, ‘Here's one of Billy's wallets. He doesn't need it. You can have it.’”

It is a universal human temptation to search out the faults of others. We feel so much better when we can identify someone else who is slipping up worse than we are. Hey, I'm not so bad! Look at him! Look at her! I'm not half as bad as they are!

In 12-step programs they call it “taking someone else's inventory.” Folks in recovery are constantly reminded to take their own inventories. Don't worry about what someone else is doing. You have enough on your plate worrying about your own behavior.

Paul's first bit of advice for being the new creation is this: “Don't take someone else's inventory.”

He then moves on to encourage good works.

II. Work for the good of all. (vv. 7-10)

In v. 10 he writes, “...whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.”

A piece in a church newsletter went something like this:

“A preacher in the Midwest tells of a woman who called him to speak of her

dissatisfaction with the program of the Church. He invited her to come to his office and talk the problem over with him. She accepted the invitation and brought to his attention some of the things that were needed and could be done.

“He gratefully acknowledged the wisdom of her ideas. He then said, ‘This is wonderful that you are so concerned and interested in this. You are the very person this Church needs to head up this program. Will you take the job?’

“Her reply was just as immediate. ‘Oh, no, I don't want to get involved. With my club work and the hours that I put on some other things, I just don't have the time. But I will be glad to advise you any time.’

“The preacher's answer was classic and well put: ‘Good, gracious, lady, that's the problem now. I already have 400 advisers. I need someone who will work.’”

“Almost everyone in a congregation says that they want it to grow. (Some put a limit on the growth, ‘I'd like to see us have about 500 members and then stop.’) If people want growth, if God promises a good harvest, why aren't more congregations growing? What is stopping the growth God wants to give?” (Brian Stoffregen).

I suspect that one way to grow as a church is to follow Paul's advice. He was a wildly successful missionary for Christ. It couldn't hurt to give his method a try.

Paul suggests, in his second bit of advice, that the way to be the new creation is to work for the good of all – and especially for those of the family of faith. Work for the good of all – especially your brothers and sisters in your church family. Good advice.

Finally, Paul reminds us that nothing matters except God's new creation.

III. Accept the new people God is bringing in. (vv. 11-16)

Don't get hung up on the circumcision controversy that Paul is dealing with. Paul says it

best: "...neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything" (v. 15). Paul's point is that nothing matters except "the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 14). Nothing matters except God's New Creation.

Dr. Daniel Chetti was a missionary in Beirut who "tells of Muslims who have come to love Jesus. The All-Saints International Congregation in Beirut, Lebanon, welcomes such to the Communion table whether or not they have been baptized, since baptism for a Muslim can lead to disinheritance, being shunned by family, or even death... Shall the table be open? The community prayed for a word from God and the word came: 'This is My table. It is not yours; it does not belong to any denomination's doctrine; it is Mine.'" (Rev. Carol E. Holtz-Martin, Pastor of First Baptist Church in Macedon, New York).

Paul's last bit of advice is this: Accept the new people that God is bringing into his new creation.

They may not look like us or act like us. They may not follow our rules, even a rule as important as baptism. But if God welcomes them with open arms, we have to do the same, remembering that God welcomes us with open arms, too!

Closing

Paul's advice for becoming the new creation:

Don't take someone else's inventory – even someone like Jim Bakker.

Work for the good of all – especially your brothers and sisters in your church family.

Accept the new people God is bringing in – even the ones that make you feel uncomfortable.

Paul writes: "...a new creation is everything. As for those who will follow this rule – peace be upon them, and mercy."

May you follow this rule – the rule of the new creation. And, as you come to Christ's Table this morning, may His peace and mercy be upon you.

Amen.