

**A Sermon for the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
for St. John's Church, Norwood Parish
8 July 2007**

Proper 9: Galatians 6:1-10; Luke 10:1-12,16-20

It has been 3 months and a week since my last sermon; it's very good to see you all again. The readings from Galatians and Luke are right on target for our purposes this Sunday: they provide the anchor for what I need to say to you on my first Sunday back in the pulpit, and a commissioning story us as we send out the Youth Group on their annual Camp Joy service project. Somehow the readings only fail to mention the strawberries we will eat later this morning.

Be that as it may, I hope when you heard the readings, the thought occurred to you, "This sounds like us; this is what we do around here -- this is what we are about to do!" Paul encouraged the Galatians, "Bear one another's burdens ... in this way you fulfill the law of Christ." This is another way of saying what today's collect affirms: "O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor." In the same vein, St. Augustine counseled "to love God and do as you please." Love of God in action leads from worship to being pleased to bear one another's burdens. I hope I don't need to remind you of all the forms that your burden-bearing in outreach takes: the service to others from this parish -- from the Opportunity Shop, to outreach offerings, buying the Committee's fair trade coffee, and again, the Youth Group's service at Camp Joy, to name but a few -- how all these manifest love of neighbor and, thereby, also manifest the love of God.

All that care for our neighbors outside these doors is important, and Paul writes, so are the ways we care for one another. Not to put too fine a point on it, ... so are the ways you cared for me over these past three months. So, I hope you thought -- well that's us -- when you heard Paul encourage the Galatians, "whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith." Your prayers, cards, calls and visits were all incredibly important in seeing me through this siege. Indeed, for those critical first 10 days in April your prayers -- reflected in the visits of Susan and Emily and the few others permitted into the ICU -- bore my burdens entirely while I was too weak to bear them myself. And then you continued through the surgery, recovery, and on into the expected, and unexpected therapies which followed. Beginning with the Stephen Ministers, a widening circle coordinated by Dorothy Hevey provided heart-healthy dinners for me, and Pastor Berner while I convalesced in his home, and then in my own digs, ran errands to the pharmacy and grocery stores, and took me to appointments back at the Johns Hopkins and Georgetown Hospitals. And because of the work of your prayers,

your well-doing for my benefit, and the truly superb medical care I received, I am here, by the grace of God, able to stand before you today. And drive and shop and cook on my own again.

A number of you have asked me, if I had any idea how much I was loved by this parish. Well, yeah, I had a pretty good idea; y'all have been unfailingly patient, kind and generous with me over what will soon be 13 years. But your love really did carry me on a river of prayer, and I hope you have some idea of how very grateful I am, and how much I love you in this parish.

Now onto the Youth Group and their work of love and service at Camp Joy this week. We are not sending out 70, but we are sending a good number of laborers into the harvest, to do what Jesus asked his disciples to do: To do what Jesus himself did; to manifest the Kingdom of God in the midst of the various needs of folks living outside Berkeley Springs, West Virginia. I trust we are sending you with the provisions you need for yourselves and your work. Nonetheless, Jesus admonishes you -- and all of us -- to travel lightly, to gladly eat the camp food and church suppers prepared for you -- without looking elsewhere for other mealtime options, and to stay put until your work is done. We will send you out in the Peace of God, and ask that you extend that peace to everyone you meet -- the folks you will be serving, and the other campers from other congregations. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, so we say to you: Be gentle with them all; they may not have your gifts or advantages, your taste in music, your urbane wit or sense of irony, but they all will have something to teach you from their traditions and life experience. Soak it up; and then come home safely, and tell us what you've learned.

And do be careful with yourselves. Luke tells us that Jesus sent his disciples out among wolves, snakes and scorpions, and then told them that nothing would hurt them. On a profoundly fundamental level nothing did hurt their relationship with God or one another, but the lives of the saints have not been without injury, disease or pain, then or now. (I'm here to testify to that!) So, among whatever animals, reptiles and insects you find yourselves, take care, wear your sunscreen and bug repellent, drink water routinely and often, sleep at night so that you do not grow overly weary in well-doing, and be careful with your tools and cautious with one another on ladders and roofs. Say your prayers daily, as we will be praying daily for you, and laugh out loud a lot. Have a great time.

If the pattern of previous years holds, you will be called upon to design and lead the vespers service for one evening. You could do worse than use today's Gospel reading and collect as an inspiration. "Worse" would be to again lead the

gathering in the suspect camp song I taught the group some years ago; you can check with me about the words later.

Finally, to paraphrase the collect, may your devotion to God unite you to one another and all whom you meet with pure affection - with gentle and steadfast concern free of prejudice or pride of position or place. That's the Kingdom of God into which we seek to live here, and we ask you to take it with you.

Harrison West+