

“What Are You Sowing?”

When my brother David was in high school he hung out with some guys who lived rather recklessly. One of his best friends was a young man who was not a bad person but he drank alcohol too much and didn't exercise good judgment. My parents really didn't like David having him as a friend, but like many situations in high school, there was only so much they could do.

When David finished his junior year of high school, he and his friend wanted to make the usual trip to Myrtle Beach for a week. They would ride in his friend's Mustang. But my mother refused to let David go. She was concerned about his safety and did not want him partying at the beach for a week.

My mother's concerns were justified. When David's friend was between Florence and Myrtle Beach, he went around a curve too fast. His car rolled over several times, went off the road, and struck a tree. His girlfriend, a beautiful 15 year old girl, was seriously injured and taken to McLeod Hospital in Florence. Despite the surgeon's best efforts, they could not save her. A life snuffed out when it had only begun. David's friend had been drinking. He was only slightly injured. Had David been in the car, he too may have been killed.

Why bring up this terrible tragedy? It is to illustrate that our actions have consequences. Even though one may be forgiven by God, the effects of what that

person has done do not go away. You reap what you sow. David's friend still had to endure the judgment of the world. He lost his driver's license, served several years in prison, and was never forgiven by his girlfriend's parents. He always had to live with causing the death of someone.

As Paul closes out his letter to the Galatians, he continues to go over ethics with them. In this chapter, Paul states a grim truth. In the end life holds the scales with an even and scrupulous balance. If a man allows the lower side of his nature to dominate him, in the end he can expect nothing but a harvest of trouble. On the other hand, if a man keeps on walking the high way, and doing the fine thing, he may have to wait a long time, but in the end God repays.

What have we learned so far from Paul's letter to the Galatians? We are not saved by circumcision, the law, or rules and regulations. We are only saved by the grace of God. We are free from the law. Even with this freedom, though, we do not want to engage in satisfying our desires. Living our life with strife, greed, and selfishness is not good for the Christian community. It is not how God wants us to live.

We want to live our lives through God's spirit in us, so that the community is best served. We want the fruit of love, patience, kindness, self-control to work through us as we live with others.

In Chapter 6 Paul gives us more ethics as to why we want to do good to others. God can and does forgive men for their sins, but even God cannot wipe out the consequences of sin. Christianity never took the threat out of life. If man sins against his body, sooner or later he will pay in ruined health, even if he is forgiven. If a man sins against his loved ones, sooner or later hearts will be broken, even if he is forgiven. As William Barclay points out in his commentary, “The scars remain.” Origen, one of the first great Christian scholars, who was a Universalist, believed that all people would be saved but that even the marks of sin would remain. As Barclay writes, we must remember that we cannot trade on the forgiveness of God; there is a moral law in the universe and if a person breaks it he will be forgiven, but nonetheless, he breaks it at his peril.

One of the lasting problems in our society in which “the scars remain” is racism. People are not born racist; they have to be taught to be that way. Racism teaches one to see others of a different color or race as less than human. It teaches that there is no respect of others who are a different color or race. The seed that is sown in racism can exist for generations and the results that are reaped are destructive and horrible for the community. One may at some point realize they have been racist, ask forgiveness, and be forgiven by God, but the racism they taught will continue to have lasting effects.

As Christians we want to sow the seeds of the Spirit. It may not be easy, because that may mean going against the culture in which we exist, or against what we have been taught in the past. “Sowing to the Spirit” means placing one’s confidence and hope in the working of God’s Spirit. Paul encourages us to not grow weary or give up, even in the face of opposition, but to endure faithfully to the end. Paul encourages us to work for the good of all, not that good works will save us, but because when we “sow in the Spirit” we will want to do good deeds. As shown by Galatians 5:22-25, our efforts to do good are to be understood as Spirit empowered manifestations of God’s working in us. The doing of good in Galatians 6:10 is synonymous with “faith working through love”

In Chapter 6 Paul wraps up his exhortation by posing a stark alternative. We “sow” either to the flesh or to the Spirit. We are all like the sower who is pictured on the bulletin cover. For Paul, there is no middle ground. The seeds we cast will fall either on one ground or the other. This means we are always confronted with the choice of where to commit our hopes, our energy, and our resources; in this choice we place our lives on the line.

The Galatians were confronted with the choice of committing themselves to a gospel of circumcision (“sowing to the flesh”) or trusting in a Law-free gospel (“sowing to the Spirit”). You, like most Christian congregations, would never think

you would accept a gospel of circumcision. But, be careful in what you assume.

Paul's warning against trusting in the "flesh" remains relevant, if we bear in mind the scope of the term "flesh" in Paul's theological terminology. "Flesh" includes such things as greed, strife backbiting, selfishness, as well as out of control sexual passions. It refers to all self-asserting activity that seeks security in anything other than the promises of God. When "flesh" is defined in that way, we can see that our congregations face the temptation to "sow in the flesh" whenever they are tempted to define or defend themselves through ethnic exclusivity (racism), through material possessions, or through violence. These are the insidious dangers we face. To allow Paul's gospel to speak to our time, then, we must proclaim boldly that from ethnic exclusivity we will reap hatred; from acquiring material goods we will reap corruption; and from violence we will reap violence.

It is amazing what can be done when the right seeds are planted. This story was recently published in the United Methodist news. In May of 1975, near the end of the Vietnam War, the U.S. military pulled out of Laos in Southeast Asia and the country fell into the control of the communists. The Hmong were a people who were in a desperate situation because they had fought against the communists in Laos on behalf of the United States. Some military families escaped to Thailand through a special U.S. airlift. Some others escaped by boat, others by walking through the jungle.

The late Rev. Jonah Xou Yang was colonel of the American secret army in Laos during the Vietnam War. He became the first Hmong clergy in the United Methodist Church after he came to America, and he was the founding pastor of the Hmong Christian Community Church in Wisconsin. Wisconsin area Bishop Hee-soo Jung recalled hearing about Jonah Yang's life story, which included a harrowing escape across the Mekong River. The Hmong began gathering as a faith community in March 1981 under Yang. Three years later, the Hmong Community Methodist Church was formed as a mission church of the Wisconsin Conference of the United Methodist Church with 70 members, including children. The church was then chartered on June 11, 1987. Its initial concerns were insufficient financial resources.

But the harvest has been plentiful. In 2009 the church changed its name to ChristWay United Methodist Church and is the largest Hmong church in the U.S. with 450 members. Its own outreach has been tremendous. A Congolese connection began in 2014, when Steve Xiong, a member of ChristWay and director of the Refugee Resettlement Agency in Milwaukee became a sponsor for a Congolese family from Mozambique. More Congolese followed. They are refugees, force to leave their country to escape war and persecution. Milwaukee Catholic Charities hosted and sponsored them as they found safety in Wisconsin.

The Congolese mission became New Hope United Methodist Church, a mission church of the Wisconsin conference, on February 28, 2017. Edumakono Zetho, a seminarian and associated pastor of the church, says: “I came to the USA in 2012, and seven months later, my mother, a sister, and a little brother joined me.” He reflects: “Today New Hope Church gives the Congolese refugees the opportunity to worship in their languages. The church also gives refugees hope to grow spiritually, and to experience healing physically and emotionally. As refugees together, we have bonded and support each other.”

What a testimony of how to work for the good of all. To me, it also speaks to how we counter the poisonous effects of racism. For those in the United States to initially be open to helping those of Southeast Asian descent, who in turn provided a haven for those in need from Africa, speaks much to breaking down color and racial barriers.

As we close today, what are you sowing? What are you reaping? The Latimer congregation knows how to sow. Last year you were asked to help out Amy and Jim Lane when Jim lost his job. With only a week’s notice, you responded with a gift to them of over a \$1000. It helped them, and after searching since then, Jim has recently found a full-time job. “Sowing in the “Spirit” has fruitful results. You reap what you sow!

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