

Growing Weary, July 6, 2025

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.

Let me read it once more, this time, from the International Children's Bible.

After the week that just was, I don't know about you all, but as simple as possible is about my speed right now.

We must not become tired of doing good. We will receive our harvest of eternal life at the right time. We must not give up!

When we have the opportunity to help anyone, we should do it. But we should give special attention to those who are in the family of believers.

In this final closing letter, Paul epitomizes the Christian life as bearing each other's burdens, being selfless, and restoring the spirit within us all by gently guiding each other back to the right path when we stumble. In writing it, Paul was no doubt a little more than frustrated.

He is delivering this message just 15-20 years after Jesus was crucified, and is already dealing with infighting, a loss of faith, and a trend within the church he founded to move back to the rituals and regulations he so passionately argued that faith should be free of.

He founded a church based on grace and love, where members were not bound to each other by rules, but through the love Jesus has for each and every one of us.

You need Jesus, go back to church.

Paul made it so clear, and yet the people lost their way so quickly.

Last week, Rona made it so clear. She argued that it takes great strength to listen to another's pain, great strength not to turn away from another's suffering, great strength to go outside our own tribe, our own comfort zone to hear things we may not want to hear, and see things we may not want to see, in order to be present to the lived reality of people whose lives and experiences are very different, and much more difficult than ours.

Weakness and sin, she asserted, come from those who don't want to care about others, and harden their hearts to pain and suffering. She closed with a hope and prayer that our common life as a nation may reaffirm the goodness and strength of empathy, demonstrating love, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.

It was powerful to me, and from the audible Amen I heard on the Youtube feed, Rona's message strongly resonated in this room, in a congregation of people who walk this talk each and every day. Rona reminded us of the true nature of living close to the Kingdom of God, and Paul implored us to not get tired of doing good, to not give up.

While I have every faith that Rona's prayer will still be answered, it's deflating that we just lived through a week in which empathy and kindness seem as distant right now as a mid-winter blizzard.

A week in which our nation demonstrated having the resources and drive to use emergency relief funds to build a 5,000 bed Federal prison in 8 days, yet the best we could figure out, with zero federal assistance, was to debate opening 12 parking spaces at Burlington's Perkins Pier for the hundreds of unhoused individuals being exited from temporary housing.

A week in which our federal leaders gleefully joked about humans being attacked by alligators as a potential consequence of simply being present in this country without authorization.

A week in which we witnessed the biggest transfer of wealth from working Americans to the wealthy elite, and the biggest erosion of the social safety net since it was created become the law of the land.

And finally, a week capped by a tragic natural disaster in Texas, affecting the most vulnerable of vulnerable populations, in which before the conclusion of rescue efforts, social media posts within my own politically like-minded sphere were already misquoting a Texas first responder to point fingers at the reduction in the Federal workforce as the cause of underestimated rainfall amounts in the local forecast.

Now that type of division over empathy is exactly what we fear most...let us not accidentally become it. After all, we shouldn't forget that last year, under a different administration, Lyndonville and St. Johnsbury experienced unforecasted and catastrophic August flooding while it barely rained here.

Pray for and help those affected first, analyze the antecedents much later.

This was not a good week for empathy, and if you're anything like me, the response to Paul's urging might just be that "yes, I am tired of trying to do good, with seemingly nothing to show for it."

Paul doesn't give us a way out, though, not only imploring us to keep on keeping on, but reminding us that there is a reward on the other side of this darkness.

In a powerful reflection, Diana Butler-Bass reminds us that

“Pentecost is more than a miracle, it’s always at hand”.

It shows up when *“we press into solidarity with others, insisting that there are no boundaries between people. When we embrace the full freedom of giving ourselves to love our neighbors. When we recognize that what we do now matters for the years and decades to come, that’s when we step away from the cynicism of the world, of the flesh — and live according to the Spirit”*, she tells us.

So then, how? I think our Gospel reading gives us a clear answer: Go out, go out together and spread the good news, do the good work, like lambs in the midst of wolves. Magnify peace, brush off the dust of rejection, and rejoice not at your own power over evil, but the heavenly reward of doing the right thing.

In tough times, it’s so important to remember that the answer doesn’t always come from up here, it comes from (out) here. Existing as this wonderful community of faith that we are depends so much more on what we all bring to each other, than what we hear in church.

Today, at the end of this long and challenging week, in which I will freely admit that I don’t have a good answer, it’s clear we need each other. So let’s make sure we benefit from our shared presence. In the time left before communion, I ask you to turn to the folks around you and have a short discussion. If you’re joining online, feel free to use the chat section on YouTube.

The topic is short, yet deep.

What have you been doing to shake the dust off of your sandals and groove on down the road? To bring empathy, to spread the good news, and do the good work in this challenging world, and maybe more importantly, **what could you plan to do?**

I guarantee the answers that help us all be able to answer Paul’s call surround us, in abundance.

I’ll see you again in about 5 minutes.