

Third Sunday after Pentecost
June 10, 2018

Text: 2 Corinthians 4:13-18

Theme: “Heavy Load”

Heavy, hard work— isn’t that what summers are for? What do you mean? Isn’t summer for vacation, being a little lazy, slowing down? Yes, it can be those things, but summer is also a time to get to those projects that you didn’t have the time or the weather for before—things like landscaping, fence repair or new construction, maybe building a deck. Summer time can be just the time to do those things. Such projects can bring a lot of sweat and soreness, but when you have completed these big jobs, hopefully you have that taste of satisfaction that more than compensates for all the sweat and sore muscles.

Hard work can be quite heavy. If it’s not going well, not producing the desired result then it gets heavier. Maybe others are not very enthused about pitching in and we carry yet more of the load. If others are actually working against us it all becomes burdensome in a hurry.

Today we have words of encouragement from one of the heavyweights of the Bible, the Apostle Paul. He knew personally about heavy loads and hard work. He assures us today that what truly seems to be a very heavy, even crushing load is accomplishing a work that far outweighs it in significance and duration. Looking to our Lord’s promises we are renewed to bear our load in joy and confidence.

Quite a load was resting on Paul. He had a hard job, though I don’t think he looked upon his apostleship as a job. He did have a job that he worked at from time to time, that of tentmaker. This was to help provide for his needs as he carried out his call of apostleship. He was carrying the message of Jesus. That could be quite heavy. We read in

2 Thessalonians 2, “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.” (vs 13) We might say there was a certain soreness that came with the work of apostleship. There was a lot of travel involved, could be a lot of it was on foot. There was opposition and danger, very real physical and spiritual danger. Then there was the anguish of heart for the sheep. Paul knew what many of them were facing and enduring. He feared for them. We hear his own words on the matter: “And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? (ESV 2 Corinthians 11:28, 29) We would find it quite burdensome to walk in the apostle’s shoes for a while, even for a day.

We are not Paul. You walk in your own shoes. What burdens are bearing down on you? You have daily routines. This inner circle on the plate can represent that. Life has its duties. There are places to go and people to see. This all requires time, energy, and resources. But the routine is not always routine. There is trouble; things break. We break. There is the trouble of sin, no one escapes this. We live in a dying world because of it.

But there is more to life, the life of a follower of Jesus. We can consider that, first of all, but looking at this inner ring. We are always in our Lord’s service. Serving our Lord happens because we are servants of the Lord. It is always fulltime. But there are particular occasions when we are dedicating our time and resources for certain activities or missions. I’m thinking of things like teaching Sunday School, helping with the grounds work, ushering, playing the organ, picking up folks to bring them to worship, sending cards on happy or sad events, serving on boards or staff. There are many things to do and so little

time to do them, maybe too few involved. Yes, time and resources, money, money that maybe we would rather sink into a new truck or a boat. All these things fill this inner ring.

Then we have this outer ring. This outer ring is associated with carrying around in our bodies the death of Christ, picking up our cross and walking after Him. As we do so faithfully we may be told we are narrowminded or bigoted. We could even be compared to fundamentalists terrorists. We could lose relationships or lose a job. In some parts of the world you can even lose your life.

When all this is going on the light and momentary affliction doesn't really weigh on us quite heavily and we are quite ready for the moment to pass. We may look around and see others with heavier loads, more on their plates, and that could bring a little comfort, the old, "well, it could be worse." But contemplation of the "worse" doesn't bring comfort for the better in the long run. So what are we to do?

We could unload. Irritated by the load we become irritable and so we begin to unload. We try to lighten by unloading on fellow load carriers or leaders. Is it time to give someone a piece of your mind. Being a little lighter in the head from an unloaded mind is usually not a good thing. We may find we are increasing the load by adding friction.

As we read 2 Corinthians it appears there was a little unloading on Paul, a pointing out of his deficiencies as an apostle. Paul could have unloaded on the Corinthians for the sake of unloading, but his words even when hard are with a building purpose in mind. We read,

"And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. ⁴ For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to

cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.” (ESV 2 Corinthians 2:3, 4).

Another way to lighten the load is to avoid that reaction against faith by keeping your faith to yourself. Hide it under a bushel, yes! We have the opportunity to give an answer for the hope we have, but we just keep it to ourselves, clammed shut as though there is no hope. For some the temptation is not to assembly for worship so there is no possibility of being caught by the officials. Is it good practice to confess the faith when it is safe, but then conform when it's not? All this could lighten our load. But what life would we have?

There is life because our Lord Jesus has carried the load. He was loaded down and then lifted up for us. Paul speaks of it clearly in chapter 5, “that in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them.” (vs 19) “For our sake He made him to be sin who know no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” (vs 21) All this is at the core, even the core of Paul's message. We resolved to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2). “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us.” (2 Corinthians 5:20) The heavy load that would crush Christ lifted from us and bore for us, that load that would leave us flattened in the depths of hell.

Our Lord Jesus did this for us, this Jesus whom some of His family thought was out of his mind today in our Gospel lesson (Mark 3:21). For some the cross seems to indicate God was out of His mind, foolishness, but really it's a matter of being out of His heart, that is, it flows from His love for us. Jesus was lifted up on the cross, raised up from the tomb, now lifted up in glory at the Father's right hand.

But we are down here below. Paul says all this affliction is producing something wonderful. It's the same thing he says in Romans 8. God works all things for the good of

those who love Him (vs 28). This word translated slight only appears one other time in the New Testament. That other time is from the mouth of Jesus. “For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:30—elaphron) He is speaking of his burden, His yoke of service. Let me give you my own translation of verse 17 of our text. ‘For this momentary light load of affliction is producing in us a heavy load of eternal glory cascading into more cascading. The key word here is hyperbole, it’s throwing beyond the boundary, not out of bounds in a bad way, but beyond the limit in a good way. How can all this be. God tells Paul in the midst of His own slight momentary affliction, “for my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9) These troubles can point us away from our strengths to what may appear to be weakness, the cross, but actually it’s glory.

It’s what happens to us as new in Christ. Outer life is one that may be descensive, but the inner life on the increase. Paul says we look not to, consider, scope out, the things that are seen, but the things that are unseen. We are taking a good look at what we can’t see through the eyes of faith.

We have life and have it to the full in Christ. We could drop off those outer rings. What we have left brings some satisfaction, some pleasure all for the moment. Still that moment is not trouble free. It’s trouble for no good purpose, a rather small life that ends in death and the worse, even the worst. In Christ trouble doesn’t go away, and we will not always understand the particulars, but the promise is there God is at work for our good.

There life in glory and there is life of significance right now. Paul writes, “For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God.” (vs 15) Part of that extending to more and more extends to and through us as we live as God’s new creations, His workmanship doing the

very works He has put before us to do. Think about that, God needs us. Oh, He could do His work some other way, but He chooses to need us, chooses to use us as His servants. We are little Christs serving those around us starting with those right next to us.

The yoke of service can be quite heavy but it's not burdensome. We have been freed from the focus of doing good to save self. That was never going to happen anyway. We serve as those who have been saved in Jesus, the One who carried the heavy load of justice for us. The load is not always fun, though sometimes it is simply joyous, and not always easy, but it is not worth comparing to the joy that awaits us (Romans 8:18). For Jesus' sake. Amen