

July 4, 2004  
Season after Pentecost  
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## **Sowing and Reaping**

Galatians 6:7-10 *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.*

“...for you reap whatever you sow.” These words from Paul to the Christians at Galatia are often used in a rather fatalistic, if not negative, way. The bad stuff you do comes back on you. But the text simply expresses the truth that our actions, thoughts, efforts, values, and decisions all have effects consistent with their intention. If our actions are filled with anger, selfishness, or hate, they produce those kinds of results. Hate breeds hate. Violence breeds violence. War breeds more wars. Greed builds up a climate of greed. And so on. The same is true of acts of loving kindness or forgiveness or mercy or good will. We always have a choice each day of how we are going to live, what kinds of seeds we will sow. We can sow and water seeds of discontentment, prejudice, fear, or we can sow and water seeds of loving kindness, non-violence, compassion and understanding in ourselves and in others. This is a “natural law” of the spirit. It’s just the way things work.

Paul put it this way. When we “sow to our own flesh” we will “reap corruption in the flesh.” By “flesh,” Paul meant self-centered existence, being concerned only with ourselves, meeting our own needs and desires, living our whole lives in order to get what we want or think we want. If we “live by the flesh” in this way, we never experience fulfillment and happiness. It is a dead end no matter how alluring or appealing it may appear. However, if we “sow to the Spirit,” he says, we will “reap eternal life from the Spirit.” And eternal life for Paul did not mean just life after

death. It meant the quality and depth of life that comes from our relationship with God, the source of life itself. This is the kind of life that is unthreatened by death or anything else. It is life immersed in God’s own love and lived out of that love and for the sake of that love.

This image of sowing and watering seeds is very important for us. It tells us that everything we do, the slightest action or word or thought, is of utmost importance and has a real effect on life around us. Our inward journey of prayer and self-understanding can reveal to us what kind of sowing and watering we are doing, both towards ourselves and others. What kinds of things do we say and think about ourselves, what kinds of messages do we give ourselves? Self-hate? Constant self-criticism? Do we think of ourselves as never good enough, never doing enough, never doing things well enough? We may be sowing and watering seeds of a perfectionism that leaves us feeling constantly inadequate. Giving time each day for cultivating awareness of what is actually going on within our own spirits can reveal to us what kind of sowing and watering we are doing. Then as we become more aware, we can begin to sow and water different kinds of seeds within ourselves. Seeds of self-acceptance and love. Seeds of understanding and compassion toward ourselves. Seeds of encouragement toward affirming and using our gifts.

Chances are that the ways we treat other people are rooted in the kinds of inner lives we have. How can we be compassionate and accepting toward others if we are not that way toward ourselves? How can we be truly encouraging of others to be their unique selves if we are not allowing ourselves such freedom? I find that when I am relating to others with anger, irritableness, impatience, and judgmentalism, it is because those things are going on within my own spirit. That is why the inward journey is so crucial and fundamental. Something is wrong with my own relationship to God and God’s love if I am not relating to others in a loving way. It is not real for me somehow, therefore my words and actions are empty of the very love I profess to serve. So I need to go back and see whether I am sowing seeds of that love in my own heart or not.

An e-mail made the rounds after 9/11. I don't know its source or whether it is grounded in fact or not. But it is a true story in the way all good stories are true—they carry truth in them. A Native American grandfather was asked by his grandchild how he felt about what had happened. The grandfather responded that he felt as though two wolves were fighting in him. One was hate and the desire for revenge. The other was love and compassion. "Grandfather," asked the child, "which wolf will win?" The grandfather replied, "the one that I feed."

If we are working with our inward journey, growing in awareness of ourselves and greater self-understanding, and growing deeper into God's love, we discover the many small ways that we sow and water in ourselves seeds of destructiveness or seeds of life, seeds of discontent or seeds of peace, seeds of love or seeds of violence. Our actions, words, decisions, and efforts then can take on the character of the love, peace, compassion, and forgiveness that are growing in us, that are being fed and water in our own spirits.

This statement of Paul's is a very hopeful statement. Our actions do have effects, for good or ill. But we must always remember the "for good" part of that. Paul urges the Galatian Christians and us to never grow tired of doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. Never grow tired of doing what is good and right. You might grow very tired as you do what is good and right. Paul doesn't say we won't. But you can grow very tired in the work of love and your heart remains light and hopeful. Paul is just saying that we should never give up out of hopelessness. For what we are doing contributes in some small or large way to the building up of life as God intends it to be. We are contributing to what God is already doing.

Then Paul urges us to never miss an opportunity to work for the good of all people. All people, not just those like us in some way. Our church. Our faith. Our circumstances in life. All people. Paul does say that we should take every opportunity to do good especially for the family of faith. But I think he means this is a non-exclusive way. Not JUST those in our own faith community, but ESPECIALLY for those nearest to us. If we are not practicing this kind of seed sowing and watering among

ourselves, with one another, then all that we do for others rings rather hollow. We are to be a community of the practice of compassion, forgiveness, loving kindness, and non-violence. When we are doing this among ourselves, then we are strengthened in our efforts to reach out beyond ourselves.

As I re-read these words from Paul this week, they came especially clear to me with the visit of our friends from Greenfield Christian Church. They came to sow to the Spirit among us, to not grow weary in doing what is right and good among us. They took every opportunity we threw at them to work for the good of all, the good of Camp Kum Ba Yah, the good of the Church of the Covenant, the good of the Festival Center. Your very presence here with us has sown good seed. Traveling so far to be with us. Clearing the trails of the Camp. Renovating an overgrown chapel in the woods so that it is now a wondrous and beautiful spot for prayer. Clearing the small green space on Fifth Street that may one day become a small park for rest and relaxation. Clearing the rubbish from the porch of the Festival Center and scraping and painting the railings, a huge step toward making that a special place. Painting the garden fence and arbors so that the garden shines even brighter and is more inviting. Painting the rooms to be used as an office and work area. You may have grown very tired as you did all of these right and good things, but you never grew tired of doing them! And I hope you leave here knowing that you sowed so many seeds of goodness, love, and compassion. Besides all the physical work you did, your presence has been an encouragement and joy to us.

Whatever we sow, we reap. When we sow goodness, loving-kindness, peace, and compassion in every word, act, thought, and decision, we increase those realities in the world. So let us never grow tired of doing these things, though we may grow tired as we do them. And let us be sure to always practice this seed sowing and watering with one another here, so that all we do otherwise carries with it the truth of what we are living with one another.