

MINISTRY is the theme of this sermon series.

YOUR ministry.

The service that God has assigned to all of us who are baptized into Christ.

During the first two weeks, we explored

The Ministry of HUMILITY and The Ministry of LISTENING

Today God summons us to a third kind of service –

The MINISTRY OF BEARING

Let's read about it. The text is Galatians 6, verses 1 and 2:

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. BEAR ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS, AND SO FULFILL THE LAW OF CHRIST

Bear one another's burdens.

The word “BEAR” means to hold up a heavy weight.

In the Good News Bible,

there appears above these words a drawing of a line of people.

Each person carries something – a box, a bag, or a bundle slung over the shoulder.

In each case, the person just behind has stretched out a hand to help the person in front, so that the whole line is connected, and every person is both helper and helped...

an excellent picture of how this ministry of ours is to work..

BEARING. We might also say “Bearing up.”

This ministry is a strain, a trial to the nerves.

It may mean holding up patiently in trying circumstances...or putting up with someone whose behavior is burdensome.

I am reminded of a story about a man who was pushing a shopping cart in a grocery store.

In that cart was a screaming baby whose noisy cries drew the attention of all the other shoppers.

One of them, a woman, watched in amazement as the man pushed his cart slowly and patiently down the aisle. Now and again, she heard him say, very quietly, "Keep calm, Albert."

At last she came up to him, patted his shoulder affirmingly, and said, "Sir, I commend you for your patience with baby Albert,"

He looked at her in surprise and answered, "Madam, I AM ALBERT!"

Bearing requires PATIENCE.

"Patience" means "suffering. Suffering from illness, or suffering under some situation, some burden, or some person.

Someone defined PATIENCE as
**accepting a difficult situation without giving God a
deadline for its removal!**

During Lent, the model for such bearing is none other than our Lord Himself, the Lamb of God who bore the sins of the world, the PATIENT SUFFERER who carried His cross down the streets of Jerusalem.

That patient BEARING we are to watch, then IMITATE.

**If any man would come after me, let him take up his cross
and follow me.**

BEARING is a very Christ-like thing to do.

But what are those "burdens" that we must BEAR?

An obvious one is the burden of PAIN or GRIEF we see all around us.

The hungry men under the Burnside Bridge,
the horde of homeless people in Haiti
the lonely old folks in the hallways of countless nursing homes,
the soldiers who come back from Iraq and Afghanistan
missing their limbs and traumatized from battle.

How many of those people require enormous investments of time,
sitting, listening, sharing, walking together...for weeks or months or years!

If you have tried care-giving,
you know how burdensome it can be, even if you love someone deeply.

Hard as it is, we can all see the need for that kind of bearing.

But what if the BURDEN
is not simply what has happened to that brother...

WHAT IF IT IS THE BROTHER HIMSELF who is the burden?

What if, in this word about BEARING,
God is calling us to BEAR the brother in all his strangeness, his eccentricity,
his UGLINESS?

Consider for a moment the people in this church family.

Mustn't we admit that we find some of them a little ODD...
or even downright IRRITATING?

Does the sight of some people make you want to run and hide?
Some come in with clothes dirty and disheveled...
others are in obvious need of mouthwash...or a bath...
others who interrupt conversations...or ignore your greetings.

I remember a teenager who was up and down during church like a yo-yo,
out to the bathroom every ten minutes...
I remember man who not only went to sleep during sermons, but snored – loudly!

Perhaps you know someone who talks incessantly,
or you sit in front of a child who kicks your seat repeatedly.

It is a mark of the church's fellowship that such people
are not merely tolerated, but LOVED!

It is the mark of a Christian that he seeks out such people, associates with them,
and then says, "Oh, you have to know him – that's just the way he is!"

But most of all, the burden meant here in these verses
is the burden of my brother's SIN.

Of all burdens, that one is the heaviest, the hardest to bear alone,
the one we must get help with or it will kill us.

Most people underestimate the SIZE of their SIN BURDEN.

A fellow pastor and I visited a man who claimed that he didn't sin very much.

My partner asked the man if, perhaps, he sinned as little as three times a day.

The man thought about it.

“Three sins a day isn't much,” he said. “Yes, I would admit to that...”

“Just think,” continued my partner, “how that adds up over time.

That would be a thousand sins in a year... and 70 or 80,000 in a lifetime.

I watched the man's expression changed as he came to a realization of the enormity of his wrongdoing.

That burden is what Jesus carried for you, friend, and for me.

One of our hymns calls it “the accursed load” – a crushing weight that killed the Son of God!

That burden Jesus bore for us.

Now He calls us to bear it for one another,

not to PAY FOR IT (He already did that!), but to help the sinning brother to a life of discipleship.

BEAR THE BROTHER'S SIN.

He does not mean that we are to IGNORE the sin.

Or to tolerate it with a shrug of the shoulders!

But rather that we seek to RESTORE THE SINNING BROTHER.

The word translated “restore” is used in the Greek language for mending a torn fishing net, or setting a broken bone – tasks that require gentleness and care!

We confront sin gently, remembering that we ourselves have often gone astray.

In a certain company, a clerk was accused of embezzling funds.

In short order he was summoned to the boss's office.

He went with fear and trembling. The least he expected was a blistering dismissal. He had visions of himself being arrested and going to jail. Humiliation. His life ruined!

When the clerk entered the office, the boss looked at him and asked, "Did you do it?" He hung his head in shame. "Yes," he whispered.

The boss paced in silence, then looked at him again. "I will not press charges!" Then he paced some more.

Again he stopped. "If I take you back, can I trust you?" The astonished clerk assured him that he would be trustworthy from now on.

The boss continued. "You are now the second man who has been caught embezzling money from this company...and been pardoned. I WAS THE FIRST! I am showing you mercy, because I received it myself."

The boss treated the clerk gently, for someone had treated him the same way.

And we have a better reason for bearing with each other, for the person whose burden God lays on us is called "brother."

One Christian writer says,

The brother is a burden to the Christian precisely because he is a Christian. For the pagan, the other person never becomes a burden at all... he simply sidesteps every burden others may impose on him. The Christian, however, must suffer and endure the brother...indeed, it is only when he IS a burden that another person is really a BROTHER and not merely an object.

Isn't it so?

My wife becomes a burden to me because she is my WIFE and not some casual acquaintance.

Our children are burdens we take up willingly – because they are OURS.

Only those people who sometimes burden you...and who let you burden them can truly be called "friends."

Why do we so RESIST this ministry?

We resist GIVING it because it is irksome.
But even more vehemently do we resist RECEIVING it because of our pride.

“I don’t want to BURDEN anyone.”

You don’t?

Then you want no brotherhood, no Christian fellowship,
no following of Jesus Christ at all...

For if no one will allow himself to be a burden,
then there will be no ministry of BEARING, and Christ’s call will be
for no purpose.

Will you listen to the call this morning?

Will you accept the assignment to BEAR ONE ANOTHER’S BURDENS?

If you will, two blessings will follow...

ONE will be for the brother (or sister)
who will be restored and included in the community
because you bore the burden patiently.

The OTHER will be the blessing you experience in doing this.

There’s an old fable about when God created BIRDS...

On the first day, he gave them only a pair of legs for standing and hopping.
The birds wept when they saw other animals with four legs.
“Come back tomorrow,” God told them.

The next day, God assembled the birds, and onto the backs of each
He fastened a cumbersome pile of bone and feathers.
The birds wept even louder this time.
“Now we have a heavy burden to carry,” they cried,
and some of those birds cursed God for His cruelty.

But God said nothing.

Only later did they find out the wonderful secret – that those loads could
lift them into the air. For they were WINGS!

During this Lenten season, we kneel at the cross of Jesus.

There He lifts from our backs the crushing burden of our sins.

There too He replaces it with another, lighter, stranger burden –
the burden of our brother, our sister.

Don't let this burden make you CRY. Let it make you FLY!

Let it be a "load that lifts" us together into the high flight of fellowship
called the Communion of Saints.

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.