

Over the past several weeks we have been reading through Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia. We have learned that Paul started these churches on one of his missionary journeys. Paul goes on to other places but then Paul finds out that some people have come in behind him and taught the Galatians some beliefs which Paul did not believe. So Paul writes this letter to try to straighten some things out with the Galatians.

Today we are wrapping up our reading of Galatians by reading words from the 6<sup>th</sup> and final chapter. Here we read words from Paul to the Galatians about how they should treat one another and how they should treat people outside of their church community. On this Fourth of July weekend these are words which can be powerful words that speak to how we treat one another as Americans and how we treat people from other countries.

### **Read Galatians 6:1-10**

Paul tells the Galatians that being a follower of Jesus Christ means you act in certain ways toward one another and toward others. And these words from Paul can be summed in the following ways.

One. Paul says that to follow Christ and be a part of a Christian community or any community means that you have responsibility to one another. If someone is caught in sin you don't kick them out. If someone is caught in sin then you help to restore that person back into the faith community.

Do we do that here? If someone does something that we deem inappropriate do we try to push them out of the faith community or do we work to try to help restore them to the faith community? When we come in contact with someone who has done something wrong are we driven by fear to expel them or driven by love to restore them?

The second responsibility that Paul says a church community has toward one another is to bear one another's burdens. Do we find ways to understand what we are going through and help to support one another or do we keep to ourselves and create environments where we are not honest with one another. I have heard people say that they can be more honest with people in their Alcoholics Anonymous group than they can in their own church.

The third responsibility that Paul says a church community has toward one another is to renounce conflict in the church. Paul cites as the cause of conflict the focusing too much on the rules of the community. So for us in churches today are we too focused on following certain rules of conduct that it leads to conflict and exclusion?

The fourth responsibility that Paul cites in a church community is to be accountable for your own actions. Reap what you sow, Paul says. So being a part of church community is not pushing responsibility onto others but claiming responsibility for ourselves. Don't expect someone else to do it for you. We must each do our part.

And the fifth responsibility of a church community, according to Paul, is to place our trust in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit. When we are faced with decisions as a congregation do we ask ourselves what does God wants us to do? Are we willing to have our minds changed because what we want to do is maybe not what God wants to happen? Do we turn to the Holy Spirit to be our guide?

Since it is July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend I thought it would be appropriate to share an example from our country's history of a community that I think lived out everything that Paul shares in the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of Galatians. But instead of an event from July 4<sup>th</sup> I am going to invite us to an event which happened on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

I've shared a version of this story before but I was reintroduced to this story this week through a posting on Facebook. It is a story which I think gives us a model as Christians and as Americans of the way we should treat people in trying times. These are the words of a flight attendant on a plane over the Atlantic on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

On the morning of Tuesday, September 11<sup>th</sup>, we were about 5 hours out of Frankfurt, flying over the North Atlantic. I was told to go to the cockpit, immediately, to see the captain. As soon as I got there I noticed that the crew had that “All Business” look on their faces. The captain handed me a printed message. It was from Delta’s main office in Atlanta and simply read, “All airways over the Continental United States are closed to commercial air traffic. Land ASAP at the nearest airport. Advise your destination.”

No one said a word about what this could mean. We knew it was a serious situation. The captain determined that the nearest airport was 400 miles behind us in Gander, Newfoundland. That is where we were cleared to land. In the next hour or so more planes landed and Gander ended up with 53 airplanes from all over the world, 27 of which were US commercial jets.

Meanwhile, bits of news started to come in over the aircraft radio and for the first time we learned that airplanes were flown into the World Trade Center in New York and into the Pentagon in DC. We were told that the local authorities would be allowing people off the planes one plane at a time.

At 6 PM, Gander airport told us that our turn to deplane would be 11 am the next morning. Passengers were not happy, but they simply resigned themselves to this news without much noise and started to prepare themselves to spend the night on the airplane. The night passed without incident despite the uncomfortable sleeping arrangements.

About 10:30 on the morning of the 12<sup>th</sup> a convoy of school buses showed up. We got off the plane and were taken to the terminal where we went through Immigration and Customs and then had to register with the Red Cross.

After that we (the crew) were separated from the passengers and were taken in vans to a small hotel. Two days later, we got the call to return to the plane and we were taken back to the Gander airport. Back on the plane, we were reunited with the passengers and found out what they had been doing for the past two days.

What we found out was incredible. Gander and all the surrounding communities (within about a 75 Kilometer radius) had closed all high schools, meeting halls, lodges, and any other large gathering places. They converted all these facilities to mass lodging areas for all the stranded travelers.

Some had cots set up, some had mats with sleeping bags and pillows set up. ALL the high school students were required to volunteer their time to take care of the “guests.” Our 218 passengers ended up in a town called Lewisporte, about 45 kilometers from Gander where they were put up in a high school. If any women wanted to be in a women-only facility, that was arranged.

Families were kept together. All the elderly passengers were taken to private homes. During the day, passengers were offered “Excursion” trips. Some people went on boat cruises of the lakes and harbors. Some went for hikes in the local forests. Local bakeries stayed open to make fresh bread for the guests.

Food was prepared by all the residents and brought to the schools. People were driven to restaurants of their choice and offered wonderful meals. Everyone was given tokens for local laundry mats to wash their clothes, since luggage was still on the aircraft. In other words, every single need was met for those stranded travelers.

Passengers were crying while telling us these stories. Finally, when they were told that U.S. airports had reopened, they were delivered to the airport right on time and without a single passenger missing or late. The local Red Cross had all the information about the whereabouts of each and every passenger and knew which plane they needed to be on and when all the planes were leaving. They coordinated everything beautifully.

It was absolutely incredible. When passengers came on board, it was like they had been on a cruise. Everyone knew each other by name. They were swapping stories of their stay, impressing each other with who had the better time.

Our flight back to Atlanta looked like a chartered party flight. The crew just stayed out of their way. It was mind-boggling. Passengers had totally bonded and were calling each other by their first names, exchanging phone numbers, addresses, and email addresses.

And then a very unusual thing happened. One of our passengers approached me (a flight attendant) and asked if he could make an announcement over the PA system. We never, ever allow that. But this time was different. I said “of course” and handed him the mike. He picked up the PA and reminded everyone about what they had just gone through in the last few days.

He reminded them of the hospitality they had received at the hands of total strangers. He continued by saying that he would like to do something in return for the good folks of Lewisporte. “He said he was going to set up a Trust Fund under the name of DELTA 15 (our flight number). The purpose of the trust fund is to provide college scholarships for the high school students of Lewisporte.

He asked for donations of any amount from his fellow travelers. When the paper with donations got back to us with the amounts, names, phone numbers and addresses, the total was for more than \$14,000!

“The gentleman, a doctor from Virginia, promised to match the donations and to start the administrative work on the scholarship. He also said that he would forward this proposal to Delta Corporate and ask them to donate as well. That trust fund is now at more than \$1.5 million and has assisted 134 students in their college education.

May we be people that put Paul’s words into action by the way we treat one another and by the way we treat other people. AMEN.

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-The Gander story is from [www.tpnn.com](http://www.tpnn.com) and I pulled it from a Facebook post by Rev. Mary Morrison.

-Given: July 3, 2016 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)