

Come Sail Away
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Galatians 2:15-21

¹⁵ We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; ¹⁶ yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law. ¹⁷ But if, in our effort to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have been found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! ¹⁸ But if I build up again the very things that I once tore down, then I demonstrate that I am a transgressor. ¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; ²⁰ and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing.

We've established, we know, that we want to drop the oars to our rowboats and let God fill the sails of our sailboat. That's in every area of our lives. Stop trying to control the outcome at church, at work, at home, at school, and put trust in God's leading, as well as God's presence no matter what lies ahead. This is so very counter to culture, sure, but, even more so, humanity. History, biblical and social, has shown that we, as people, try so hard to establish our relevance. We try to accomplish things on our own. We try to prove we are capable. That's true from the earliest age – who hasn't known a toddler who, when offered help, loudly and empathically proclaims "I DO IT!" That's the hallmark of humanity's straying from God. To God's help we say "I DO IT!" And we are often reluctant to receive help from our fellow humans, too.

This independence, this establishing ourselves, this proving of self is **not** what God asks, though. Moses, whom God chose, tells God multiple times how he is not capable of doing what God asks.¹ Jeremiah tells God "I am only a boy"² when God calls him, when God chooses him. The thing is, God doesn't vet any of us for our capabilities. That's not even on God's checklist of requirements, that we be capable of what God has in mind.

¹ Exodus 3-4.

² Jeremiah 1:6.

When we are brave enough to say “I don’t know,” God doesn’t flinch, God doesn’t care. And yet, this is just another of God’s standards which confounds because it doesn’t sync up to our human standards.

Business priorities, and general capitalistic priorities, prize those who are compelled to have everything planned. Perhaps you, like me, have been in a store and needed help of some kind. If the person I find to help does not seem to have control over the situation, or at least convince me that he or she is intent on effectively and efficiently helping me, I can promise I don’t think to myself, “It’s okay, she’s letting God lead her to what really matters.” I want to deal with someone who has their stuff together. I value that in an interaction and I try to live up to the same.

There is a television show on the Esquire network called *Boundless*, by which our family is captivated. In the first season last year we followed Simon and Turbo³ on what are considered extreme athlete events – ultramarathons and the like. This season they have added two more to their group, Rory and Hunter.⁴ Rory has competed in a variety of ultra-events, and is such an accomplished athlete that she is one of the faces of the brand The North Face. She knows exactly what she needs to survive and thrive during a long race and, quite regularly finishes the races, even when two or more of the others don’t. All because she is prepared. And then there is Hunter. He packs lightly and figures he will figure it out as he goes along. The most regular component in his survival kit is a tremendous self-confidence, but not uncommonly it lacks the essentials for finishing race. Hunter, not infrequently does not finish. You may guess for whom I root.

But life is not an episode of *Boundless*; self-sufficiency is not key, personal best is not actually the goal. Yes, you heard me, in life, personal best is not the goal. Once more, in life, personal best is not the goal. That’s not how God made this world. God made us to be in relationship above all else. We don’t need to be prepared for every possible outcome; we simply need to be ready to share and provide in every possible situation where we, our gifts and ourselves, are needed. Let me be clear – that does NOT mean every place where we

³ Simon Donato and Paul “Turbo” Trebilcock.

⁴ Rory Bosio and Hunter McIntyre.

CAN help. Nobody has enough of themselves to go around for that. It is much more finessed than that – it means every place where God GUIDES us to help. Every place where God directs us to help. Every place where God sends our sailboats.

For the early church, we know where they saw God guiding them – to help the widow and the orphan, to help those who had less than others. We read in Acts how they pooled their resources so that they might share them. We read “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possession and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.”⁵ And we read “Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.”⁶

These, these acts of the apostles, are not things that could be done by people relying on their own capabilities, people who were trying to prove what they could accomplish on their own. Which one of us could care for a whole community by selling our possessions? Joan Gray would say they were certainly a sailboat church for “...the dominant attitude in the sailboat church is that ‘God can do more than we can ask or imagine.’ Its leaders know that what they have or lack in the way of human and material resources is not the decisive factor in what they can accomplish as a church.”⁷

This earliest church believed themselves to be who Paul declared them to be. In his letter to the church in Galatia he sought to show them by example and so declared “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” Pastor Heidi Husted Armstrong breaks it down this way: “In contrast to a prevailing cultural fixation on self, we die to ourselves (‘it is no longer I who live’), that Christ may live in us (‘it

⁵ Acts 2: 44-45.

⁶ Acts 4:32-35.

⁷ Joan S. Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers: A Handbook* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2009); p. 39.

is Christ who lives in me'). Crucifixion is not the end; it leads to new life in Christ."⁸ Just because the early church was able to do this does not mean it was easy to do. Crucifixion was painful, a painful death. Loss like parting with our goods, loss like parting with society's values, loss like parting with the self we've worked hard to establish, those losses are painful. That kind of loss is a painful death of who we have been or that for which we have strived. That kind of loss is not something people easily embrace. But "Crucifixion is not the end; it leads to new life in Christ."

When we are hung up on what we should be able to do (our capabilities) or who we are supposed to be (according to society or even according to what other churches or other Christians think we should be), then what we can accomplish feels quite limited. And it should, because, as Jesus said, "for God all things are possible."⁹ Friends, together, you, me, and God can do more and be more and go farther in our sailboat than me or you in a rowboat. And so we carry our crosses to our crucifixions, toward dying to self so we might be rising in Christ. Come, sail away with me.

Let us pray: Lord, lead us into more than we could imagine or do on our own, we pray.
Amen.

⁸ *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 3*, p. 138.

⁹ Matthew 19:26.