

## ***Sow to the Spirit***

**Galatians 6:7-11**

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Just in case you are interested, the saying, "you reap what you sow," comes from the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of Paul's letter to the Galatians. It's an interesting thing to know – one of those tidbits to tuck under your hat – a moment of biblical trivia. It is also interesting to note that we have often been taught only half of this saying. When adults tell this moral lesson to children, they usually do it with a stern, forbidding voice: "You reap what you sow," which implies that the child is not sowing the right thing. This is scripturally correct. In the first part of this scripture, Paul writes: "If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh." What we might forget to teach, or what we might have never been taught, is the second half of the teaching. Paul writes: "but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit." For me, this second half is much more interesting. If we sow to the Spirit, we reap eternal life from the Spirit. Now that's something worth knowing about!

Both Jesus and Paul use the image of sowing good seeds as a metaphor for understanding our relationship with God. Sowing seeds is an agricultural image. Jesus and Paul lived in an agricultural society. Any farmer knows that you sow only good seeds in good soil. Planting bad seeds in bad soil produces a bad crop. So, this image of sowing seeds would have made a lot of sense to those who were listening. Gardeners know this, too. Making sure that the soil is balanced and the seeds are healthy is critical to growing healthy produce. In fact, it is such widely understood knowledge that if someone were to do otherwise, people would wonder why they wasted their time.

This is not quite as obvious on a moral level. Even really wonderful people have been known to sow the wrong kind of seeds. Paul calls this: "sowing to the flesh." This can be anything from immoral behavior to small, self-serving habits. Paul sees this happening in the community at Galatia. The Christian community is arguing among themselves about what is the right way to follow Christ, and Paul is writing to help them understand more fully. He implores them to refocus their energies on "sowing to the Spirit." When that happens, they will reap eternal life from the Spirit. It is this energy and way of being that Paul encourages.

Sowing to the Spirit is a lovely way to live life. Basically, it means choosing to focus on qualities of the Spirit and incorporating them into who we are. In the same letter, Paul has explained that the gifts of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. As he explains what he means by sowing to the Spirit, Paul encourages his readers to "work for the good of all."

It is interesting to explore how this kind of sowing is happening in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It has become a worldwide, interfaith effort. A number of years ago, Karen Armstrong, a religious scholar and author, founded The Charter for Compassion. Recognizing that compassion is a quality of God that is conveyed in all faiths, she decided to bring the world together in an interfaith dialogue around the importance of compassion for all. In June, the United States Conference of Mayors endorsed a statement praising the cities throughout the country that have chosen to have compassion as a key policy for their

communities. While this might seem obvious for some of us, it is new for many who set policy and implement procedures.

Paul understands that to reap to the Spirit is not just about caring for others. It is also about the transformation of our souls. When we care for others, we gain more than we give. Mahatma Gandhi taught: "the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."

The other day, while thinking about this sermon, I spoke with Ralph Worth about his experience of building the Habitat house. One day, he was putting up walls and working side-by-side with the woman who would eventually own the house. He realized that this house and all the work put into it would go to someone he now knew. There was a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment. A home means so much to us, and now this woman and her family would have one, too.

I think this is what Paul means when he explains that when we reap of the Spirit, we reap eternal life of the Spirit. On one level, this is about life after death, but on another level it is about knowing the essence of eternal life right now. When we engage in a quality of the Spirit like compassion, caring or joy, we encounter a glimpse of eternal compassion ó eternal caring ó eternal joy.

A few weeks ago, I was talking with a minister from another denomination that is a bit more conservative than our church. One Sunday morning near Pentecost, the praise band was playing at his church. As he was listening, he looked up to the back of the church and saw that one of his older members, a 92 year-old man, was standing and dancing in the aisle. The Pastor realized that most people couldn't see the man dancing, so he walked up the aisle and brought him down to the front. Then he started dancing with the man and the children got up and started dancing and other members joined them. Suddenly, he sensed that this was a glimpse into the eternal ó they were flooded with joy and God's presence lifted them into Holy Joy.

We have mystical moments like that at First Church, too. Just the other day a woman, with sparkling, dancing eyes, spoke to me with such joy and love after a service that I felt as though I was looking into the eyes of Holy Wisdom.

Paul says: "If you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit." May our hearts be open to sowing to the Spirit, and may God be with us on the journey. Amen.

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