

Being a Burden Bearer

Romans 15:3a

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

At times you see something that I don't. At times I see something that you don't. At times you see something that your partner doesn't see; at times she sees something that you don't see and it's the same at work, you know it. There are times when you see something and your colleague at work doesn't see it or your roommate and there are other times that they see something that you don't see. Some things I am stronger in than you are, sometimes you're stronger in something than I am. And you know it's exactly the same at home. In some things you are stronger than your friend is, and in other things she is stronger than you are. And then it's the same at work. In some things you're stronger than your colleague; in some things your colleague is stronger than you are. And loved ones, wherever you manage to get your head above the water and mine isn't --or wherever I manage to get my head above the water and yours isn't -- or wherever you manage to see above the crowd and your friend doesn't see -- or wherever somehow you manage to drag yourself out of the encroaching darkness that the spirit of anti-Christ is trying to bring into this world -- wherever you manage to be able to see something that your friend can't see or your colleague can't see, this dear word says you have some obligations.

And the first of them you'll find in the first verse of Romans 15:1. "We who are strong", and we are all strong in different ways at different times -- "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves." And of course one of the things that we all saw, a couple of Sundays ago was, "bear with" is not a good translation of the Greek verb "bastazein". The best translation is one for instance that is in the King James version; that when we find ourselves in a strong position like that, when you find you can see something or you can get your head above the water and your friend can't, you've to bear the failings "of the weak", you've to bear those feelings.

Not kind of bear with them, in the sense of put up with them as a martyr, but bear them. Your friend has a tendency to look on the black side of things, or your friend has a tendency not to really bear and understand the troubles of another person. You've to bear that failing, you've to bear it yourself. They have a tendency to look on the black side of things, you've to bear that. You've to bear it the way Jesus did, the way he bore our sins on Calvary was -- "ah...ah...ah..." -- a punch to the solar plexus, he absorbed it; he absorbed it. We used to talk about Marciano [American professional boxer] and some of those other real fighters, the punishment they absorbed, they absorbed it. That's our job, we have to bear it, we've to absorb it, and we have not to pass it on.

So when they talk about the black side of things we bear it, we take it into ourselves, we absorb it and we bury it there, and we kill it and it dies there. We don't bear it to someone else, and say "You know, she has a tendency to look on the black side of things." You bear it in your own body on the tree with Jesus; you bear the failings of your friend or your colleague or your neighbor or your loved one, you bear the failings in yourself and you allow it to die there. You don't bear it as a tattle tale to someone else. And the effect of it is, you stop the thing boomeranging back to the person who has that weakness.

That's what happens; you stop it boomeranging back, as it always does, if you talk about it or as it always does if you highlight it in your mind. You bear it, and you kill it, and you forget it. And

the incredible thing is that that stops dead in its tracks; it's a spiritual chain reaction that always takes place with sin.

And just as Jesus bore our sin, so that it didn't create hell on earth right this moment, so we are to bear the failings of the weak, our dear friends. And so, you prevent them drowning in their own saliva, that's it. You prevent them drowning in their own saliva because that's what happens. We have all weaknesses, we have all failings but if you will bear the failings of your weak brother or weak sister at that moment, you'll kill that inside and destroy it dead.

Of course an interesting effect of this is, that the spirit of the Savior who bore our sins like that, floods into your heart, that's always what happens. Every time you bear something like that in yourself, even if it has had an effect on you, and even if it's been directed against you, every time you do that, it's amazing -- the spirit of Jesus seems to reward you by flooding into you with the spirit of love and the spirit of joy and the spirit of peace.

If you don't do that, the spirit of the accuser of the brethren flows in upon you, and the spirit of the betrayer of the brethren flows in upon you. And you'll feel kind of dirty or you'll feel dissipated or you'll feel ah! -- there's something not quite right. But if you bear the thing and allow it to die inside you, and ignore it, and overlook it and forget it, it dies and it has no effect on your friend and it ceases to have any effect on you. And the spirit of Jesus flows in upon you.

That's what happens, if you are willing to bear, if you are willing to bear in yourself, if you are willing to be a shock absorber. Because sometimes the weakness is different, sometimes the weakness in your friend is that they are critical of other people. They are just critical, they just say a little critical word or they pass on a little critical hint to you. If you bear that inside yourself, if you bear that failing and you allow that failing to end there and you act as a shock absorber and you absorb the shock of that -- just as Jesus himself absorbed the shock of our sins upon his Father's heart, if you absorb the shock of that -- you enable that loved one to carry on in relationship with that mutual friend.

But if you take advantage of that weakness of theirs for making critical comments about a mutual friend and instead you pass it on to the mutual friend, in order to increase your sense of confidence with that other mutual friend -- in other words, in order to build up your own relationship with them, in order to reinforce the opinion they have of your deep insightfulness, into your mutual friend -- if you instead bear that to them, you create havoc in the relationship amongst the three of you.

Loved ones, we have to bear the failings of the weak. That means we are to take them into ourselves, we are to absorb the punishment and we are to allow it to die there, without anyone knowing what a magnificent martyr you are and what a saintly person you are and what a deep insight into human nature you have and how utterly dependable a friend you are, without anybody knowing that. Without anyone at all knowing, that you have borne the failings of the weak. That's what the Bible says we are to be willing to do, when we find ourselves in a position where we can see something a little better than somebody else, where we can see something a little more clearly than somebody else. And then as with Jesus, don't forget there's finally a position, where on a clear day you can see forever. And when you get to that spot, and you can see a lot of the things that others are missing, the Bible says, "You are to bear the failings of the weak." So that's one sense in which we've to respond to those who are weaker than ourselves or whom we find ourselves stronger.

Now another sense, loved ones, is in the next verse, if you look at, in Romans 15:2. "Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him." In other words, when you see a weakness in your friend, in your wife or your loved one or your son or your daughter or your colleague at work or your room mate, when you see that weakness, you've not to stand off from them with horrified eyes. "I have never seen such evil in all my life" or "I have never seen such weakness in somebody who is supposed to be a man." You don't stand off. You don't stand off from them at a great distance and get your whip and then lash them, you don't. You draw near to them. "Aresketo" is the word for "please". It is "to be in agreement with". You get next to them. You draw right next to them. You identify yourself with them, you remember the thousands of weaknesses that you have in yourself, you draw right beside them and you get your arms around them. And that's what Jesus did, that's what he did.

You'll see it in Luke 23:39. It almost startles you when you think of the Savior, the Holy Son of God, hanging on this cross. And to say the least of it the kind of company he kept, because the real company he kept was you and me, so we should even be more horrified, but Luke 23:39. "One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, 'Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong. And he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' And he said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'"

And that was Jesus, right alongside the guy, right with his arms around him even though he was utterly unlike him, right with his arms around him. Because he knew what this man needs is not to be rebuked. The Holy Spirit had already convicted him of his sin, that's the task of the Holy Spirit. What this man needs is to see that he has been crucified with me, that he has been raised with me and made whole and clean and honest in me. And the moment he begins to sense that he will be freed. And the Savior stood right beside the man, and put his arms right round him and lifted him up into it.

That's what we have to do. We have to be agreeable with our loved one or our friend or our colleague who has the weakness, we have to be close to them, we have to please them, we have to do everything to lift them up into the position that they already have in Jesus. We haven't to rebuke them. Have you ever seen a dad teaching his son to ride a bicycle? Or have you ever seen a dad teaching his son how to kick a football? Or have you ever seen him teaching his son how to swim? Most of us have dear dads and moms who did those things for us and the little guy isn't balancing the bike at all. He isn't! The bike would topple over in a minute but the dad has it there and it's as if the little guy is balancing because the dad has hold of the bike and he says, "Yeah, you are doing it, you are doing it." And then he lets him go a little, just a little and the guy goes and is about to fall down but the dad is so quick that the little son doesn't even realize he is about to fall.

The dad has his eyes so much on the son, he has so much the feel of the bike, that he can catch it even when it's just tending to go over on one side. Why? Because he knows that there is a law of gravity that will keep that little guy up. If that little guy will once begin to get his faith in that law of gravity, and act according to that law of gravity, that's it. The dad knows the last thing he has to say is, "You are a dumdummy, why don't you get up and do it properly?" That won't do anything -- that will just destroy the little guy. The dad knows that all he has to do is to get him to go a couple of feet on his own, then the little guy will feel the law of gravity, he'll feel, "Yeah, it works, it works." That's what we do with each other.

You are in Jesus, you have been changed, you can't fix that faucet. The Lord has given you the cleverness to fix that faucet. You are not great at the house work; the Lord is able to help you do the house work. Like look, look, see it, see it, see the way it's working -- and then suddenly before you know, they know how it works. Same with the football, the dad so plants the football with the wind behind, that the football will almost take off on its own, without the little guy even touching it. But the dad knows that, the dad knows that if he can only get the little guy to just put his foot to that ball, in any kind of way, he'll begin to see that there is a law of mechanics that gets that thing going.

And it's the same with the swimming. It's so noticeable, you know it. Your dad holds your chin and holds your tummy, holds all of you, so that you stay up whether there was water or not, but he has you kick and kick and teaches you to kick and it wouldn't matter, you are not kicking at all and he is holding you up but you don't know that. Because the dad knows if he can once get you to trust the law of flotation, that you'll begin to swim and so he does everything just to ease you into faith.

That's what we do. We edify, we build up our loved one or our friend or our colleague. We build them up in faith, that they have already been changed in Jesus. Their Creator has done everything to take away their inadequacy. He has done everything to give them his own strength and if they once have faith in that and begin to believe that even though on my own I am hopeless, and I always do look on the black side of things and I am so critical of people and I seem always to do this thing wrong and I always seem to make a mess of that -- as they once begin to sense that they have actually been put into Jesus, and they have been utterly changed and transformed and the strength of Christ is already in them and all they have to do is act on the basis of that -- and they'll find, lo and behold, that Jesus rises inside them and they are able to do it.

If they once sense that, their weakness will disappear. Our job is to please those who are weaker than us, to get alongside them and to build them up, to edify them, to build them up in their confidence that they have been changed. Yes, you have been changed and here is the proof of it. See the way it's lifting, see the way the bike is going, see the way you are able to swim, see the way the football is flying, see the way you are already able to do the thing, that's it.

We are all in the same boat. All of us have terrible weaknesses but they all have already been changed by God in Jesus, and all of us are able to be free of them, if we'll just believe that. Our job is to help each other believe that.

The third obligation we have is the one we'll just mention briefly today. It's Romans 15:3, "For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached thee fell on me.'" The so called weak person turns around and tears you apart for your extreme sympathy or for thinking that you can help them in any way, they just rebuke you, they just strike right out at you and they'll reproach you -- at that moment, go all the way with Jesus.

Remember that he came for one purpose, not to condemn the world but to save it. Don't step out of him at that time, don't step out of him at that moment, don't sink back into yourself and say, "Well, I tried, I did what the Bible says I am supposed to do, I tried -- but look what I get for it?" Don't -- don't be put off by the weakness that Satan has put into their mouth or the reproach that they have expressed to you. Look at the weakness that is still in them, see them still as loved ones that need to be lifted into Jesus.

Do not step back into the position of the judge. Stay in Christ, maintain your full liberty in Jesus, stay in the Person who said, "I have come not to condemn the world but to save it". Refuse to step back into a judging position, refuse to be separated from them by Satan. If you allow yourself to be separated from them, they have no hope. You are their one hope; you are the one who has seen their weakness. You are the one who has that contact with Jesus. You are the one that can lift them, don't leave them. They are drowning, even if they've hit you and bled your nose, with all that thrashing, you keep your arms around them and lift them into Jesus by your faith. Why? Because that's what the Savior did for us. That's how you and I have any chance -- because the reproaches that we laid against our Father in Heaven, he took upon himself. Because Jesus did that and poor man, he had one hand up like that, to keep back the blows of Satan and our blows and our insults and our spits. He had one hand up like that and the other hand round us like that. One hand to shield himself and the other hand around our waist, drawing us to himself because he knew, if he didn't get us to himself, we'd be lost. That's it.

Yeah, bear their reproaches. Why? Jesus said it, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." The wee soul, who is weaker than you in something, needs your help, even if it appears that they are reproaching you for helping them or that they resent you. You continue to love them and you have faith for them and you lift them into the Savior. That's what God has for us. Why? Because when they see that in you, they begin to touch the real Spirit of Christ and that is the ultimate lift onto the cross that you can give them. As they see their reproaches falling upon you, even as you are trying to help them, and they see your continued love and your continued faith rising, they see Jesus incarnate in you and to see your steps right through you and they begin to sense that they too can be lifted onto the cross into a position of victory.

Loved ones that's it, that's what the universe is about, that's the final reality. The final reality is, that kind of heart is in our Father and let me tell you a secret, that's finally what will work and that's finally what will triumph and that's finally what will last until the ages end. That is the Spirit of God; that is final reality.

Let us pray.

Dear Father, we would bow before you this morning, and review our attitude to others, when we have discovered some weakness in them. Lord, we repent this morning of our past behavior where we have majored on that weakness and we have not borne it, except that we have borne it to somebody else's ears. And we have made hay while the sun shone and we have built up our own reputation at the expense of theirs. Father, we repent of that this morning. We turn now permanently away from taking advantage of our friend's weakness. Lord, we accept the responsibility to bear that weakness in ourselves and to absorb it, and to end it and stop it dead in its tracks, so that no one hears it, so that it never sees the light of the day.

Lord, we commit ourselves to bearing the failings of the weak and to delivering them from the reflex effects of their own sins. And then Lord, we commit ourselves now to getting alongside them as our dads did with us. Father we know there's little that we are able to do, that someone like our dad did not teach us. And Father in so far as our fathers and our mothers reflected your loving heart and your loving patience, so Lord, we would start getting alongside our friends. We would start lifting them up, encouraging them, building up their faith, in what you've done for them on Calvary. Building up their conviction that there is a power within them that is greater than themselves and that is able to change them and enable them to do these things.

Father, we commit ourselves to being encouragers and builders up of others. Father, we commit ourselves to so lifting them in faith, that they'll suddenly find themselves walking on water and realize that they can do it every day. And then Lord, when they'll reproach us or when they criticize us, or rebuke us, we commit ourselves, our Father to going all the way with you Lord Jesus and to bearing their reproaches, as you bore ours. So that they may see at last your Spirit come forth from us, and they may allow that Spirit to take hold of them and lift them onto the hill of Calvary and then on up into the Father's arms and on to his right hand, where they can do all the things, through Christ, who strengthens them. So Lord, we commit ourselves to being the strengtheners of those who are weak, so that you may be fulfilled in their lives and they may be delivered. And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God be with us now and evermore. Amen.