

Do you remember the folk song from years past with the words, "He's not heavy, he's my brother"? I always wanted to change the words of that song to my title for today, "It's okay, he is my brother." Now I think that is what the writer of the song was implying but I want to make it clear, it's **because** he/she is my brother/sister that it is okay.

Paul is concerned about our relationships with one another. He is concerned with the relationships among the Galatian congregation. He sees the church as a family and he knows how hard it is for families to get along. We are called to be concerned about and to care for one another. We are called to be like Christ in our relationships with one another.

How do we reach our goal of being together in Christ? We bear one another's burdens. It is not always easy to get along. Sometimes our brothers/sisters are heavy and we don't want to help shoulder their burdens.

I chose the story of David and Jonathan this morning because of their unique relationship. Here are two young men who, according to conventional thinking, should be enemies. Jonathan is the eldest son of King Saul and he would be in line to be the next King of Israel. However, Saul has displeased God and David has been chosen to be the second King of the nation. Saul is out to kill David, who he sees as a threat to his kingdom. Jonathan at first does not believe his father is so against David but events transpire that convinces Jonathan also of Saul's anger against David. They have made the plans for one final meeting. If it is safe for David to return to the King's presence one set of instructions will be given. If it is not safe then Jonathan will give another set of directions to the boy with him. It is not safe and now for the last time Jonathan and David meet. Their friendship is greater than bloodlines and in this last moment they bear one another's burden. (I remember a song we used to sing at camp: "knit our souls together like Jonathan and David's.")

Mitch Albom in his book, Tuesdays with Morrie, writes about his broken relationship with his brother. Now this is not the theme of the book but the subject comes up now and again throughout his time with Morrie. Mitch's brother is struggling with cancer and has moved to Europe and there has been little or no contact with his family, especially his brother. There is something in Mitch that wants to share his brother's burden and there is something in his brother that does not want to impose on his family, etc. Now, as I said the book does not really deal with this relationship except for a few brief references where Mitch shares about his concern for and wish to support his brother. He longs to be able to share in the burden.

Relationships are powerful. Paul understands how important they are in our lives and offers some simple, practical advice. I like Paul. He often writes complicated theological statements (even Peter says that Paul is sometimes

hard to understand, e.g. II Peter 3:16). But, he always has some very practical advice. Here Paul says:

Forgive as you have been forgiven – you may need forgiveness some day.

Love as you have been loved – you may need love one day.

Share as you have the ability – you may need help one of these days.

In other words, do not grow weary in helping one another out, in bearing one another's burdens. As you sow so shall you reap.

We have a friend who loves cucumbers and hates squash. One spring he decided to grow his own cucumbers so he could have them fresh from the vine. Now, if you don't know, cucumber and squash seedlings look a lot alike! He was showing his son-in-law and me his newly planted cucumbers. We examined them and said, "You know Ed, these look like squash plants." He would not be deterred. He waited for his fresh cucumbers. He had the best squash crop in the neighborhood. What you sow so shall you reap.

Eugene Peterson in *The Message* begins this 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of Galatians with these words: "*Live creatively.*" I really like Peterson's translation. It is a challenge to the church as we seek to bear one another's burdens to do it creatively. Now we often get stuck in ruts. We do the same thing the same way over and over again. I recall the story of a man who had the same lunch day after day. He would constantly complain to his co-workers about it. One day they had had enough and asked him why he didn't have his wife make him a different lunch? He replied, "Oh, I can't. I make my own lunch!"

We know how things are supposed to get done. We have always done it this way before. How can we do things creatively anyway? I was sitting next to a colleague at work the other (my second job) and she got excited. She had discovered a computer shortcut. Now rather than 4 or 5 steps to accomplish a task she could do it with just one! She had found a new way. It brought a shout of joy for this less than computer savvy chaplain.

In the course that I assisted with at Fuller on Creativity and the Arts, we had 42 students who had almost given up on the church. They were a group of very creative people and yet had been told by the church that their creativity was not welcomed. The church did not welcome their ideas about how things might be done differently, creatively. And yet, don't we serve and worship a God who is creativity at its highest? Look at the beauty of spring. Is this not a God who honors creativity? If in nature, why not in the church?

How can we creatively bear one another's burdens? I mean there are days when we can't even bear our own. Are there ways to be creative? I read of a community where people trade skills. One is a baker who, though retired, still loves to bake. She trades a nice hot apple pie for having a dripping faucet fixed. The community has discovered ways to get small tasks done by sharing skills. The plumber helps the electrician who in turn helps the plumber. God has given us gifts and asks that we use those gifts to help bear one another's burdens.

We, though, have this independent spirit, especially we Baptists who shout out our autonomy. Although, if we read our history, we have never been independent, but we have been interdependent. Yes, the local church can make its own decisions but it also is linked to others through associations, etc. We are traditionally interdependent. We lift up our American independence and forget that we gained our independence with the help of the French. We were never really independent.

I recall my grandmother talking about growing up in the early 1900's. She would share of barn raisings. She told of times when the whole community would come together to help out one another. This was especially true at harvest time. One neighbor's lost crop would reflect on the whole community and so they would work together to insure that all the crops were safely gathered in. It was a time of interdependence, not independence. A very Biblical concept and one that Paul pushes here in Galatians, bearing one another's burdens.

We were serving a congregation in down east Maine when the call came out for help in renovating a house. Paul and Winnie Dodge (American Baptist missionaries to Thailand) had bought a house in the area and it needed remodeling. Were any of us able to come and help them get this completed before they returned to Thailand? I have a few scars to prove I did. It was a great time, working with Paul and Winnie getting this house in shape for them to rent and to have a place for retirement. I expected nothing in return. About 20 years later Diane was in Thailand as a volunteer at the New Life Center and she came down with a bad case of dengue fever. It was Paul and Winnie who were there and who cared for her over that time. Now, they would have cared for her anyway but it reminded of Paul's call for us to bear one another's burdens. Who knows when we will need someone to help us with ours.

How can we do this creatively? By letting God's spirit move in our midst and challenge us with ways to work together in new and different ways. By moving from the past to the future and go where God is leading us. And, especially by moving from independence to interdependence.

Eugene Peterson sums it up this way:  
*"So let's not allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good. At the right time we will harvest a good crop if we don't give up, or quit. Right now, therefore, every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all, starting with the people closest to us in the community of faith."*

It is okay, he/she is my brother/sister.

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Albom, Mitch, Tuesdays with Morrie, Broadway Books, 1997  
Peterson, Eugene, The Message, Navpress, 1995