

# On the Teeter-Totter

## July 3, 2016

### Galatians 6:1-16

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When we lived in Bellevue, we lived in walking distance from a city park. Our granddaughter, Alexis, loved the metal teeter-totters there. These were a new experience for Alexis, so we helped her ride.

One day, she met a new friend. They rode the teeter-totter together. Her friend's mom called her home. So the little girl jumped off the teeter-totter when her seat was at the bottom. That put Alexis at the highest point, and she landed on the ground with a pronounced "thump." Fortunately, there was damage only to her feelings.

She learned a valuable lesson. Everyone must do their part. That's true on the teeter-totter. And that's true in the Church.

There's a push and pull in Paul's words today. In Galatians six, verse two, he says, "*Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.*" Then in verse five he says, "*For all must carry their own loads.*"

Come on, Paul! Carry one another's loads? Or pull our own weight? Paul's answer is "Yes." N. T. Wright puts it this way. "When it comes to my neighbour (*sic*), I must be sure to remain humble if I offer help; when it comes to myself, I must recognize my own responsibility for my actions."<sup>i</sup>

Life in the Church is like riding a teeter-totter. **For Jesus people, "I" is never separate from "we."** That's today's main thought. **For Jesus people, "I" is never separate from "we."**

This is the last of the sermons on Paul's Letter to the Galatians. So, where has Paul taken us? We are baptized and beloved children of God and followers of Jesus. Paul was called through God's grace. The Galatian Christians were called through God's grace. So are we.

We respond to that grace with the faith called trust. Our relationship with Jesus and his Church is all about that faith. That faith results in Christian freedom. Christian freedom is loving service. That loving service is a teeter-totter experience. **For Jesus people, "I" is never separate from "we."**

This is true for us as individual Jesus people. Teeter-totter living is the most counter-cultural thing we Jesus people do. Desperate and selfish individualism is the reigning paradigm of our time. "Individualism," writes Eugene Peterson, "is the growth-stunting, maturity inhibiting habit of understanding growth as an isolated self-project."<sup>ii</sup>

Many people believe we can be fully human without other people. In his play, *No Exit*, Jean Paul Sartre set the tone for this time. "Hell," he wrote, "is other people."

That bleak assessment stands in sharp contrast to the Biblical witness. “*It is not good,*” says the writer of Genesis, “*for a person to be alone.*”

This means that life in the community of the Church is necessary for Jesus people. Many folks are leaving church these days because they don’t have the stamina for real human community. They may find tranquility, but the price is loneliness. Human life is a teeter-totter experience. If we abandon our seat, someone else will land with a painful thump. And we will be less than human.

So this week and every week, think about someone you haven’t seen at worship. Don’t just wonder where they are. Call them and tell them you miss seeing them. Offer them a ride. Volunteer to sit with them. While you’re at it, make it a rule here that no one ever sits alone. **For Jesus people, “I” is never separate from “we.”**

This is also true for us as a congregation of Jesus people. We are part of a larger whole. Our church wide bishop, Pastor Elizabeth Eaton, reminds us that “we are church together.” Individuals need the push and pull of living in responsible community together. Congregations need the same kind of push and pull to be healthy.

That’s why we send a portion of our offerings to the Western Iowa Synod office. And that’s why they send a portion of our offerings to the ELCA church wide offices. It’s not good for us to think that somehow we’re flying solo as a congregation.

Flying solo is not an option for us. Without the Western Iowa Synod, you and I would not have found one another. We wouldn’t be able to support the Tanzanian girls’ school with our gifts. Without the ELCA’s help, this congregation would not be experiencing renewal and redevelopment. For us to pretend we’re on our own would be willful ignorance.

Instead, we thank our Lord often for this partnership in the gospel we share. Otherwise we’d be alone on the church teeter-totter. And it’s not good to be alone.

**For Jesus people, “I” is never separate from “we.”**

We model this for our neighborhood and community. I had an interesting conversation with one of our neighborhood folks. He was so grateful the church is helping with neighborhood events. He noted that many of you who help live in other parts of Council Bluffs. “But,” I reminded him, “The church lives in this neighborhood.” He had to think about that for a while. I hope you will as well.

**For Jesus people, “I” is never separate from “we.”** Let’s pray...

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<sup>i</sup> Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians*, page 76.

<sup>ii</sup> Peterson, *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing Up in Christ*, Kindle Location 1252.