

Ode to the Bike Path

A Sermon for Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC, Lexington

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Galatians 5:1, 13-25

5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

5:13 For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another.

5:14 For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

5:15 If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

5:16 Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh.

5:17 For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want.

5:18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law.

5:19 Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness,

5:20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions,

5:21 envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

5:22 By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,

5:23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

5:24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

5:25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Ode to the bike path.

Early summer mornings,
I ride through a dappled green tunnel,
Past meadows filled with talkative birds,
Past fast moving chipmunks,
Past a family of swans on the edge of a pond
so beautiful they demand that I pause.
Past two horses - palomino? Chestnut?
who live just a block away from the church.
And a thousand friendly labradoodles.

Traveling this way, I notice the changing scents of the season:
First, the wild roses -
I think you can only really appreciate them when passing by bush after
bush
At slow cruising speed.
Then, the sweet honeysuckle of my childhood,
Though it may be invasive,
It brings forth memory.
Days later, the smell of whatever weed is so pungent just for a week as
spring turns to summer.

Traveling this way, I cannot expect to be on time.
It is far more important that I pull over to talk to Pilgrims and friends who are on the path at the same time.
I would not have encountered them in my car.

Traveling this way, I must choose carefully what I carry. Only what is necessary goes in the saddle bag.

Traveling this way, my goals narrow to one: arriving safely. I renew that goal every time I pass by the ghost bike for my friend.

Traveling this way, I practice gratitude:
I give thanks for knees that, though tight, are still pushing.
I give thanks for the place that I live, and the place that I serve, and the bikeway that goes almost door to door from point A to point B.

I give thanks for the weather -
 Though most of me cries out for rain
 I'm glad not to ride in it.

I give thanks for the back up plan (bus) and the back up back up (Lyft) and the third backup (Zipcar).

I can get anywhere I need to be.

I give thanks for people's generosity -
 So many, ready to hand me their keys.
 So many more, ready to help in other ways.

This was not Plan A. I deserve no credit for commuting in this way - our car went kaput and we've had to make due. We will get another car - I am counting down the days - but I don't need sympathy either. This is a minor problem compared to the cares of the world in these days and hardly

noticeable compared to what many of you carry. This, as I said to a colleague, is a problem based in great privilege.

But I will confess that when our old car died I was moved by the desires of the flesh and had a hard time living by the Spirit.

5:19 Now the works of the flesh are obvious, Paul says,

fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions.

And surely I engaged in idolatry and jealousy.

(Your car is really nice. Really really nice.)

And surely I engaged in anger, quarrels, enmity and dissensions.

(The first mechanic named an astonishing number. I was overwhelmed. The second mechanic said, I know a nice parts dealer who will buy your car. When a dealer over-promised and misled, I was angry!)

And surely if someone had told me it would have done any good to engage in those other works....well. Let's pray I would have resisted.

By turns I was - no, let me be honest - by turns I have been and still am angry, frustrated, bitter, whiny, pouty and self-pitying.

Someone in my family pointed out - with love - that my level of emotional angst about a car was excessive.

After my initial glare, I saw the wisdom in this comment. It helped to reset my perspective.

In the text two weeks ago from Galatians we recognized one of the earliest creeds of Christianity - the equality of all people in the eyes of God and in the eyes of the church.

In this week's text from Galatians we recognize the first and foremost rule of the Christianity: the rule of love.

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another.

For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Riding through that verdant tunnel these last few weeks, I have pondered the rule of love. How might I in this moment live according to the rule of love?

Might I be more patient with the toddler on training wheels, might I share a smile rather than a yell, might I pray in genuine love for the people who frustrate me, might I somehow love those I really don't want to love right now?

How might I harvest the fruits of the spirit?

"By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things."

As I rode through that verdant tunnel with news headlines fresh in my mind, I pondered patience and self-control, knowing that screaming my lungs out would not be fruitful. I realized that exercise, and the focus required by biking, made me more mindful and calm.

Note, I'm not suggesting that we all give up our cars - like I said, we'll be getting a new one as soon as we can. I know, also, that many folks do not have the physical ability or the luxury to spend a month biking all over creation. I'm suggesting, rather, that when life presents a challenge, we

look for the silver linings, the blessings, the fruits of the Spirit that relate to those challenges. When life gives me lemons, I can bike to the store for sugar and make lemonade. I come back so often to Paul's invitation to live in thanksgiving and gratitude in all circumstances. Paul knew of hardship: he was part of a persecuted community; he spent a lot of time in jail; he had physical challenges. Even so, his invitation was to Rejoice in the Lord always. Give thanks in all circumstances. His advice was not to ignore hardship, difficulty, injustice - but to behave according to the rule of love even while working to heal harm; to give thanks in the midst of hardship.

So I ride through a long dappled green tunnel,
I pause by a great meadow,
I talk with my neighbors,
I ride on in love.

Amen.