

The Rev. Seth Dietrich

July 9, 2023 - Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Putting Down the Burden

It's not uncommon to have a 10 pound weight for strength training. If I held it for 1 minute it's OK. If I held it for 1 hour, I would have a real ache in my shoulder. If I held it for a day, I bet I would be so sore I couldn't even use my shoulder for days at a time. It's the same weight, but the longer I carry it, the heavier it becomes.

Many of us carry things not just in our hands, but in our minds and in our hearts. We carry heavy things that make us feel so weighed down. Maybe trouble with school work, maybe trouble at home, maybe when we get sick or someone we love gets really sick. Sometimes we might feel guilty about something we did. Maybe someone made fun of us, or laughed at us, or we did something really embarrassing. And maybe we smile and say, Oh, I'm tough, I can carry anything, but actually it is really weighing us down. Remember: the longer I carry it, the heavier it becomes.

Jesus said: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Jesus said you can put it down, give it a rest, you don't have to carry it all by yourself. If you are feeling heavy because you are having trouble at school, or there is trouble at home, you can bring that burden to Jesus and say here, this is too heavy to carry by myself. If you are sick, if your heart hurts because someone you love is sick, if we messed up, all of these things.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. How do we give these things to Jesus? I want to talk about 2 main ways.

One of the biggest ways we put things down is we tell other people. Jesus is inside the people who are here. Jesus is with all these people in the church. I think Jesus is inside everyone who loves, everyone who is kind, every who opens up their arms to share a burden whether they belong to a church or not. Jesus is in humans.

So One of the biggest ways we put things down is we tell other people. We get it off our chest. Remember: the longer I carry it, the heavier it becomes. So even though it can be so hard to talk about hard things. So hard to get it out.

One time someone said some pretty mean things to me in an email. I had kind of messed up a little but they reacted in this huge over-blown way. And the worst part is that instead of just saying what I did was bad, they were saying I was bad. And you know what I kind of believed them even though it was not true. And I felt really ashamed. And I didn't want to tell anyone

because I thought they would think I was bad, too. But finally I worked up the courage to tell some people to share the burden. Just getting it out. And you know so often Jesus, God the Father, the Holy Spirit, speaks to us through other people. And I was able to hear this voice of truth say, "Hey everyone makes mistakes. You're not bad. You are just a human."

Jesus can help us carry the heaviest things for one another. We don't fix things, we don't take away the burden, but we say, I'll listen, I'll be here. I'll help you carry it.

The second way we put down the burden is we pray. In many ways prayer is a way that we unload, put things down, get things off the chest. Prayer is a way that we stop smiling through gritted teeth, pretending that we are so tough and we can carry anything. We stop that and let go.

Now I find the longer I'm in a tradition in which prayers are so often written down, the more I'm drawn to writing prayer. Not just hearing it, but seeing it, composing it. One does not have to do this, it can just be a groan. Make a prayer box in which you can slip in pieces of paper. Write it in a journal. Write it down and then throw it away. Put them into words and let them go.

Anne Lamott, wrote a book and she broke prayer down into 3 main categories. And I think all prayer kind of falls into these 3 buckets: Help, Thanks and Wow. I would add silence as prayer, too.

Help - This is too heavy. A person you are worrying about. A situation. Something weighing on you. Not carrying this all by ourselves. Lamotte talks about the ways that saying help and giving it to God often injects some air and light into the tight, cramped space.

For prayer exercise: Write down anyone or anything you are carrying that you want to give to God. Something or someone you can't stop worrying about, give them to God. People you know, people, you don't know. People in your neighborhood, people across the world. I can't carry this by myself.

Thanks - Gratitude. We take so much for granted. When you are feeling a heavy load, gratitude can be a way out. Actively calling to mind what you have in your life. If you are breathing, if you are alive, there is more right with you than wrong with you. And then gratitude so often leads to service. We realize the abundance we have and we want to give.

For prayer exercise: Write down anyone or anything in your life, in this world, that is good. What are you grateful for? What makes your heart sing.

Wow - Something that is bigger than us. Wow is a kind of praise. God, your world is bigger, more mysterious, more beautiful, more terrible. Wow and Awe are very similar. If Help is about God's immanence, that God listens to each of us. Wow is about God's Transcendence.

For prayer exercise: Write down those things that make you say My God, Wow. Art or music, or something in nature. Peak experiences in your life.

The longer you carry it, the heavier it becomes. Jesus said: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” Give voice to your burdens with other people. Give voice to what you carry in your heart through prayer: Help, Thanks, Wow.