



bits from bob....

Woe is us if we do not...

October 19, 2020

"I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome. I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." (—Paul, writing in Rom. 1:14-16)

Several years ago, Jan and I visited with long-time friends whom we had known for more than two decades. We had stayed in touch but had not seen one another for several years. We sat down and began to catch up on the happenings in our families. I was overwhelmed by the tremendous hurt and pain that surfaced. For long months, our friends had struggled with aging parents who, unable to stay by themselves, were fiercely independent in their resolve to avoid a nursing home. Long nights, jarring early morning phone calls, pressures, love, responsibility and duty had all combined to wear away the energy and spirit of two wonderful Christian friends whom we remembered as much younger than their tired faces and graying hair.

Life! A husband takes care of an invalid wife for months, napping rather than sleeping. Such ordeals take their toll; they tire the body, and the soul. When life changes dramatically, coping is often difficult. We stay by the side of those we love deeply, saddened by the loss of vibrant personalities and charming manners. We face life's daily chores because we have no other option. Others praise the way we continue under severe stress. No compliments necessary: We are simply doing our duty, fulfilling a commitment made years ago.

I see that kind of commitment waning. Marriages are broken, faithful Christians let go of spiritual roots. I fear for future generations. To the Corinthians, Paul wrote, "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel." The phrase speaks of duty. How sad if we fail in our duty. Duty simply means that the responsibility has fallen to us. Today, duty seems old-fashioned – it is not in vogue to speak of what I ought to do, have to do, must do. Duty is in danger of being pushed aside by selfish claims to rights.

Daniel Webster said, "A sense of duty pursues us ever." My friends had discovered the meaning of duty. It is not popular, it is not easy, it is not inexpensive. Duty became mine the day I was born. I am obligated. I am debtor. I can never repay those who touched and changed my life. Duty focuses and shapes me. It compels me. Duty is mine as a Christian. I will do whatever is necessary to fulfill my duty.

Relationship with God carries with it a sense of duty. Paul had it. Ezekiel had it. After Ezekiel's wife died, he writes that he had been preaching to the people the very morning of the day she died. He commits to preaching the next morning again--right on schedule, as commanded. Ezekiel's life was changed, his home gone, but the next morning he is preaching. Why? I think it has to do with duty.

I diligently seek to take the gospel to the lost, to friends and neighbors, to souls around the world. Christ's love compels me, but I see also another motivation. I continue to share the gospel out of duty. Duty may be a little old-fashioned, but my Webster's dictionary still has it -- right below Dutch, right above duumvir. My great desire is that my life will also have it. I pray that "duty" will be clearly seen in the life and thinking of every Christian, every church. Woe is us if we do not share the gospel!