

BE THE INFLUENCER

A Sermon by Seminarian Kathy Hartzell

Rocky River Presbyterian Church, Rocky River, Ohio

June 7, 2019 - 4th Sunday after Pentecost

- Galatians 6:1-10 (NRSV) 6 My friends,^[a] if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill^[b] the law of Christ. 3 For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. 4 All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. 5 For all must carry their own loads. 6 Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher. 7 Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. 8 If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. 9 So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. 10 So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.
- Luke 10: 1-11, 16 1 After this the Lord appointed seventy^[a] others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. 2 He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. 3 Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. 4 Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. 5 Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' 6 And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. 7 Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. 8 Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; 9 cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'^[b] 10 But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say. 16 "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

This sermon is inspired by an article by William Peel and Walt Latimore, titled “*Five Keys to Spiritual Influence at Work.*” An Influencer is a person who has the ability and capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behavior of someone or something, or the effect itself. Influencers are known in many different genres. There are cultural, social, economic, political, religious, and spiritual influencers. Spiritual influence focuses on hearts and minds, changing people from within. It sways their thoughts, perceptions, and their values. As a result, influence also has the power to change behavior. We may be tempted to assume that influence comes from our positions. Yes, some careers or economic status provide more opportunities for influence but any person can be influential. One guide to being spiritually influential is found in following these five essential keys.

Spiritual influence requires competence. Excellence and competence do not imply we are better than everyone else. It does mean, however, that we are serious about doing our best.ⁱ In Galatians, Paul reminds us the best of humans slip up. The word Paul uses (*paraptoma*) does not mean an intentional sin but a slip as on an icy road or dangerous path. The danger of those who are really trying to live the Christian life is that they are apt to judge the sins of others harshly. Paul says that if a person does slip up, the real Christian duty is to get them on their feet again. The word Paul uses for correct is the same word used for making a repair like that of a surgeon as they remove a growth or set a broken bone.ⁱⁱ Who would want an incompetent person performing such a task? This is the fundamental principle, if we want people to pay attention to our faith, we must first pay attention to our own competency. Are we trying our best?

Spiritual influence requires character. Competency is just part of the equation. It is not enough to be knowledgeable, having all the hymns and verses memorized. We can all think of a brilliant, competent man or woman whose character flaws diminished their influence. Authentic Christian character consistently impresses people. It engages people because God designed men and women to admire the character traits God possesses. When we exhibit, peace, love, and joy, we reflect Jesus’ character which produces a profound impact and influence.

Spiritual influence requires consideration. Nothing speaks more about your character than how you treat people. As the saying goes, “People don’t care how much we know until they know how much we care.” Caring is true life in

community. Bearing each other's burdens, knowing that I am as vulnerable to temptation as my neighbor and every bit as dependent on the grace of God. Paul calls us not to compare ourselves to others or ignore another's burden but rather engage in self-examination, always considering what God has done for us in Christ. When people witness Christian competence, character, and consideration, the things we say have power equal to or greater than any sermon from a pulpit.

Spiritual influence requires wise communication. In the Gospel of Luke Christ gives us a lesson in how to communicate and spread the news that "*The kingdom of God has come near to you.*" I have met many people that tell me they are uncomfortable talking about their faith. Many believe their actions can speak for themselves. The problem with that, as Paul tells us, we are human and we all slip up. Therefore, we must be ready to give an answer for anyone that asks the reason for the hope that we have. And when we are ready, we are to be like the seventy Jesus sent to harvest the people. The task of harvesting is not an "In your face" effort nor do you have to tip toe around it. You just need to be wise.

Christ first direction is to start with prayer for the workers. Prayer reminds us that at the heart of this work is God. They were not to be cluttered with things but to travel lightly. The baggage we bring along so often gets in the way. They were being sent by the Lord. In faith, they could be confident the Lord would provide. They were to be focused on the task. They were to bring peace and accept peace where it is offered. There was a gentleness to their mission and God's grace went with them. Where their work was accepted, they gave abundantly, where it was not, they moved on. ⁱⁱⁱ

If we approached our own sharing of the gospel with prayer, gentleness and concern, we can see that it becomes natural to talk about our faith as we build relationships with another person in our communities and our work. It is appropriate to share your faith when it naturally fits into the topic of conversation. It is always appropriate to talk about your faith when you are asked. This is not an invitation to dump all your spiritual knowledge on someone in one sitting. The disciples gave enough information to open the door for Christ. We can open the door of curiosity for future discussions. It is also realistic to not presume that people will respond positively.

Spiritual influence requires courage. Following Jesus is anything but a safe undertaking. You will meet opportunities and obstacles that will challenge you to the end of your faith. Remember that true safety is following Jesus wherever he

leads. But playing it safe is the most dangerous thing you can do if Jesus is leading you out of your comfort zone. A close walk with God is always an antidote for fear. Just as Jesus prepared the disciples for rejection so to we should be prepared as well. Paul knew this very well and kept in contact with the churches to encourage and build them up. Last semester in my New Testament class we were given an assignment to write a letter, as Paul, to our home church. The scripture for today got me thinking about the letter and I was amazed to find that the content of the letter was aligned with today's readings. I would like to read the letter, hopefully, to encourage and build you up.

A Letter to the Saints of Rocky River Presbyterian USA Church, Rocky
River, Ohio

From Paul, called not by human appeal but by the will of God and set apart as an apostle for the gospel of his Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ, and Kathy our sister, a servant of our Lord. To the beloved saints of the church of God in Rocky River, Ohio. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Though I will not be able to visit the church in Rocky River, I have heard wonderful news about the church family and the life in Christ you have embraced. I give thanks to my God for your faithfulness to the gospel and your passion to live by the Spirit. You have discerned as God's will and written on your hearts this purpose, "*Praising God, Teaching Faith, Serving Others.*" I pray you intimately know this call as led by the Holy Spirit and strengthened by your relationship in Christ. This is especially important because you are a church of influencers; abounding in spiritual gifts. I encourage you to let the Spirit work through you to achieve your purpose. It is the mission of your church to offer an inclusive place to worship the Lord, share the truth of the gospel, and show the unconditional love that God, by his grace, so lavishly gives to you and me. This practice has no place for stinginess, judgement or self-righteousness. These are the sins of the flesh, to which we are no longer bound. For you who are in Christ, the law of the Spirit of life sets you free from the law of sin and death.

Kathy has reported that your faith and love of the gospel keeps you standing firm against those that are indifferent and hostile to your beliefs. It is with the Holy Spirit's guidance and the spiritual act of worship you seek not to conform yourself

to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Rom 12:2). In this way, you find courage and inspiration to show God's steadfast love. Continue to build each other up, encouraging each other to put to good use the gifts of the Spirit and to practical use the variety of human talents that are needed for everyday life. Demonstrate to each other and to those outside the church that the family of God honors everyone. Do not let anyone fall into the sin by considering themselves better or privileged. This will lead to pride which can corrupt the community of believers. God created diversity and our diversity is lifted as a glorious part of God's creation. Most importantly, remember that all comes from the one Spirit. No one gift, talent or person is above another, but we are all members of one body, the body of Christ.

The attitude of acceptance, love, and inclusion should be extended outside of the church community and into the world around you. Living by the Spirit produces the fruits of love, kindness, peace, generosity, patience, joy, and faithfulness. We know that the teachings and words of the Spirit seem like nonsense to the unbeliever but our actions, as demonstrated through the fruits of the Spirit, have lasting impact. We know we are called to freedom by the Spirit, but this should not be used as an excuse to be self-indulgent, rather through love we become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in this commandment, "You shall love God first and love your neighbor as yourself." (Gal 5:13-14) Each of us should love our neighbor for the good purpose of building them up. God will give you the dedication and encouragement to live in harmony with one another.

I encourage you to bless and not curse. Do not seek revenge or repay evil with evil for we must allow God's wrath to be the final word for those who do evil in this world. We that have already died to sin with Christ believe that we will be raised from the dead with him. We know that Christ died, was buried, was raised, and appeared to the apostles and more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time. Through Jesus, those who have died and those who are alive will be transformed into heavenly bodies bearing the image of the man of heaven, Christ. These things are a mystery to us now but when Christ returns all things mysterious will be made known.

Therefore, be unwavering in your love of God and Faith in Christ. Do everything as for the Lord, devoting yourself to prayer and to the encouragement

of each other in the Spirit. Be committed to living in Christ. I send our sister, Kathy, to work with you in your mission.

May the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love and mercy of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

ⁱ William Peele, Walt Larimore. *Five Keys to Spiritual Influence at Work*.
<http://www.christianity9to5.org/five-keys-to-spiritual-influence-at-work/>

ⁱⁱ William Barclay, "The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians," The Daily Study Bible Series. Westminster Pres, Philadelphia, PA. 1976.

ⁱⁱⁱ William Barclay, "The Gospel of Luke," The Daily Study Bible Series. Westminster Pres, Philadelphia, PA. 1975.