

Sexagesima: February 4, 2024
“Blissful Boasting for Every Moment”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

This morning we hear from St. Paul, “*If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.*”¹ These seem like strange words from a man that we often do nothing but build up. When we speak of Paul, there are often two times in his life that we speak of; either we speak of him as Saul, the great persecutor of the faith, or we speak of Paul, the great apostle and teacher of the faith.

So, what does he mean by boasting of weakness? The context of the letter is important. Paul was writing to the Corinthian church that was being burdened with false teachers. The false teachers had such a hold on people that, as Paul says, “*You bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face.*”² The false teachers have the people so snowed that the people were happily being enslaved, devoured, taken advantage of and struck in the face. As painful as that sounds, there is a deep spiritual truth that underlies them all.

The false teachers were enslaving people back under the law of self-righteousness. They were being taught that they should be looking to their own works, or their own sufferings as marks of being “true believers.” It was understood that what really mattered is your experience. Your day-to-day experiences would be interpreted as manifestations of God, and you were the only one who could give a proper interpretation to your suffering; in other words, this was your story, you are writing it with God as a supporting actor.

Let me give you an example. I am driving through the Wal-Mart parking lot and cannot find a close enough parking space; so, I conclude that it is God’s will that I have to walk more. This is a ridiculous example, but these kinds of things happen all the time. False teachers are telling people that their own individual truths are what God uses to determine right and wrong for you.

False teachers turn men and women back to look at their own works, their own words, their own lives, as things that they can do good enough, and must do good enough, if they are to be given the Gospel. They are taught that God’s love, God’s forgiveness, God’s grace is anything but; rather, it is a payment, a payment for being and doing good. Because the sinful nature likes to hear of the great and wonderful things that it can do, it gladly submits. Paul drives this point home by using some very picturesque language; he says the Corinthian church gladly submits to being abject slaves, devoured (that is eaten, consumed and destroyed), taken (that is robbed,

¹ 2 Corinthians 11:30

² 2 Corinthians 11:20

stolen, taken captive), and smote in the face (that is flayed, skin removed).

It is no secret that false teachers make me more upset than people who listen to them. Teachers in the church are entrusted with the Words of God to make sure that they are purely taught and handed down for your exhortation and comfort; teaching you and giving you what you need, equipping you to live life. These words are just as much to you as they are to pastors. Boasting can and must only be in one place—God and His Word. This is the importance of the thorn in the flesh. We don't know exactly what it was for Paul, but we do know what it did. Its purpose is humbling. It shatters the ridiculous boasting in which the sinful nature is so prone to engage.

In what do we boast? What is it that we deem so important? What do we want God to see about our lives and reward, or worse, what do we want our neighbors to see and boast about us? Maybe the better question is what really matters to us? As many as there are people on this earth are there answers to these questions. Some vie for comfort or pleasure, others hold to wealth or popularity as being the highest good. Still others will say what really matters is family, or respect, or even a sense of security. Some even go so far as to say what really matters is being right.

Paul says what matters is “*that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*”³ That is the same as saying that what really matters is salvation; Christ—He matters most. Blissful boasting sees this only right and proper perspective. What really matters is not this moment or the next moment, but what holds all moments together, or in the One in whom all moments find fulfillment.

Think about the moments of your life, even one day. One moment you may be eagerly hoping for good health, and the next moment you are anxiously on a phone call with a family member who has revealed some terrible news. One moment you may be rejoicing in finally getting a lead in cards with your kids, only to lose and be set back a long way in the next hand. One moment you are wishing for more money, the next you are wishing for more time. Good moments and bad moments are just that, they are moments. Some may leave lasting memories, some we learn from, but they all pass. Many try to cling to these moments, and even spend much anxious toil in trying to recreate certain moments of the past, to alleviate some moment in which we are currently living.

This is how addiction works—drugs, alcohol, six commandment situations, stealing, lying, despising preaching and the Word of God, despising authority, these all are manifestations of not fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things as they show our great veracity of being unsatisfied, of being discontent. Think of whatever it is that brings you pleasure. The first moment is grand. The pleasantness and the enjoyable feeling is enchanting. It pulls you in and

³ 2 Corinthians 12:9

wows your socks off; but then, it just becomes common. It is an every-day, commonplace, blandness ritual that needs something to spice it up. The long-haul drudgery of what lies before this once fun activity shadows the enjoyment that once was felt.

This is a phenomenon known as the law of diminishing returns. The first moment is good, but given enough time or sufficient repetitions, and even pure joy, as we perceive it, can become obnoxious. That taste or sensation that was such pleasure at first becomes tedious and painful if we cannot escape it. Make no mistake, there can be a good side to this; pain that is unchanging and unremitting tends to fade from our awareness over time.

This thinking is what keeps many away from the Word and Sacraments of God. It is what drives many to disregard their catechisms, let their Bibles gather dust, and harden their hearts to His Word and those whom God has sent to speak it. This thinking is what keeps many latched to the lips of a bottle, the metal of a needle, or the sheets of the bed. This is what keeps many ears tuned to gossip, and fingers sticky to wealth, possessions, and power. There must be more, it needs to be spiced up and given a bit of zest.

So what matters? Paul points out the folly of following the false teachers. Listen with wisdom and testing with the word of God. Paul is amazed that the Corinthians permit false teachers to abuse them. With their false doctrine, the listener is abused by deprivation of comfort, hope, and certainty of salvation to the hearer. Strike someone until they are bruised and bloody, and they might recover; but rob them of the hope of salvation by placing their hope in their own works, or their own feelings, and they might not even feel a moment of discomfort. They might feel empowered to make things right with God, or some other foolishness. But, unless they discover the lie that they have been sold, they cannot recover, and will fight the rescue attempts others might mount to save them, right up to the moment they meet God face to face, and hear Jesus say those four most horrible words in all of human history, "I never knew you." This is why Jesus lovingly instructs, "***Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.***"⁴

For the false teachers, for the wicked, what matters is right now, this moment; what matters for the Christian is Jesus. He has died for this moment; not just this moment, but for you. God has baptized you for this moment and this moment and this moment and every other moment He has granted to you as a gift to live life on this side of heaven. To boast in our own works or our own moments are fleeting and silly; blissful boasting is to speak of God's Work in creation, redemption, and sanctification. He is with us every moment of every single day, giving us

⁴ Matthew 10:28

Himself to strengthen us so that we may endure to the end and hear these words, “***Well done, good and faithful servant.***”⁵

The Servant of God, the Suffering Servant prophesied in Isaiah, did the heavy lifting. He kept the Law which we were both unable and unwilling to do. He died in agony to bear the wrath of God against you and your sin. He was abused and scorned, He was flayed and devoured by falsity and hatred—all for you.

⁵ Matthew 25:21

Three days later, He rose from the dead and He taught. He spoke the truth and commissioned men to continue this work. He commanded that disciples are made by baptizing, teaching them to guard all that He has said and done. It is not to be messed with, it is for you to endure and live life through every moment, every day, He give to you.

The Holy Spirit through Paul says, ***“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”***⁶

We share in Jesus resurrection and glory in the life to come. He is what matters above all else. It would be nice if we had good health, but it will end one day, unless Christ returns first. It would be good to have money, but you can't take it with you. It would be great to have a government that is not rife with division and unrest. It would be fantastic to not have any discomfort or pain in any moment to deal with; but this will pass. Christ gave Himself. You have God Himself who dwells in you and you in Him.

⁶ Romans 6:3–14

Brothers and sisters in Christ, He changes every moment; better, He joins every moment together. This doesn't mean you will have no bad moments. It means He gives you a right perspective. Whatever thorn in the flesh God gives you to keep you grounded in this life, to not be too haughty and know that you need Him, you need a Savoir, you can pray boldly, ***“This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Save us, we pray, O Lord! O Lord, we pray, give us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord. The Lord is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us. Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar! You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you. Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!”***⁷

Whatever thorn is piercing your flesh, whatever cares and worries of this life seek to choke out the good seed of God's Word in you, God's grace is sufficient for you. His power is made perfect in weakness. If you ever need a reminder, look no further than to the cross; weak to the world, salvation to all those who believe. It is not our suffering that is enough, it is His that is necessary. This cross, His cross, His death is what we boast.

Let us pray:

“God gives me my days of gladness,

And I will

Trust Him still

When He sends me sadness.

God is good; His love attends me

Day by day,

Come what may,

Guides me and defends me.”⁸ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

⁷ Psalm 118:24–29

⁸ Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me LSB 756:3

Prayer of the Church

Sexagesima

4 February 2024

Lord of the harvest, You send Your Word down on earth to give seed to the sower and bread to the eater. You are living and active among us, calling to repentance and raising to new life. Lead us not into temptation, and protect us from the crafts and assaults of the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh, which do not want us to hallow Your name or let Your kingdom come. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Send forth laborers into Your harvest, that we may be preserved in the pure teaching of Your saving Word, whereby faith toward You is strengthened, charity increased in us toward all and Your kingdom extended in all the world. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Caring Father, visit the homes of Your people. Keep them from all harm and danger, and grant that we would dwell together in peace under the protection of Your holy angels. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, look favorably on the nations of the world and their leaders, that all who receive the sword as Your servants would bear it according to Your command. We pray that war, hate and bloodshed would be overcome by peace, justice and love. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Amber, David, and Rayna* celebrate their birthdays, and *Megan and Amanda* celebrate their baptismal anniversaries. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, have compassion on the sick and suffering in mind, body, or spirit, *especially Richard, Esther, Marvin, Ruth, Zoey, Betty, Jeri, Denise, Jillian, Marv, Pastor Small, Debbie and those we name in our hearts.* Make them and those who care for them to know Your peace, which the world cannot give, and bring them out of all their troubles. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, Your Son has promised to be with us always, until the end of the age. Strengthen and preserve us today as He comes to us in His Holy Supper. Grant that we would faithfully receive His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins and so obtain everlasting life. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank You that through Your Son, Jesus Christ, You have sown Your Holy Word among us. Prepare our hearts by Your Holy Spirit, that we may diligently and reverently hear Your Word, keep it in good hearts, and bring forth fruit with patience; and that we may not incline to sin, but subdue it by Your power, and in all persecutions comfort ourselves with Your grace and continual help; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the same Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**