**Stewardship Sunday – Christ’s Love, Our Calling: Love Speaks Passionately**

**Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY September 1, 2013**

**Based on 1Timothy 1:12-17 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**To the King be honor and glory forever!**

**I. He came to save sinners**

**II. He called you to service**

*12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength,* *that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.* *13 Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor* *and a violent man, I was shown mercy* *because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.* *14 The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly,* *along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.* *15 Here is a trustworthy saying* *that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners**--of whom I am the worst. 16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy* *so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience* *as an example for those who would believe* *on him and receive eternal life.* *17 Now to the King* *eternal, immortal,* *invisible,* *the only God,* *be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

**I. He came to save sinners**

Last week MAJ Nadal Hasan was sentenced to death. He was found guilty of walking into a medical processing center on Fort Hood, murdering 13 people and injuring over 30. If Paul had written this letter to young Pastor Timothy today, would he have said, “I am the chief of sinners?” or would he have said, “I’m not as bad that guy.” Certainly there were men in Paul’s day guilty of heinous crimes. Of course… Barabbas! He had been guilty of rebelling against the Roman government, inciting riots in Palestine. He had murdered innocent people.

Contrast that life with Paul’s. Paul had rebelled against God. He made it his personal mission to destroy Jesus’ saving name. He taught people that Jesus was not the way to eternal glory. Heaven could be earned by trying hard, by doing your best. He sabotaged the faith of many people. He robbed sinners of a heavenly treasure. No wonder Paul considered himself the chief of sinners.

He could have excused his behavior. In vs13 he admitted, “I acted in ignorance and unbelief.” Paul was convinced that what he was doing was right. He followed his conscience, though it was misguided. He was ignorant, he acted in unbelief. The same could be said for MAJ Hasan. He acted out of belief that the United States is wrong, and that the best way to defend his people is to murder. His conscience is misguided. He is acting in unbelief. Does that excuse his sinful behavior or that of the Apostle Paul?

God’s Word is clear: those who sin will die. Sinners must be punished for their sins, whether deliberate, knowing full well what God’s law says, or if they are crimes against God committed in ignorance. The death sentence must be carried out on all who sin.

Is Paul’s confession your confession, “I am the chief of sinners?” Or would you rather change the text of the next hymn to, “Chief of Sinners though I be, I’m not as bad as she or he.” There has to be a worse sinner here somewhere… at least I’m not as bad as that murderer in Fort Hood. I haven’t murdered anyone. Did you know that the Bible says, “**Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him?”** (1John 3:15) Hate is not just an emotion, it is an attitude that manifests itself through words and actions. Isn’t your hatred evident when you try to judge someone else’s motive? Isn’t hatred evident when you blame your anger on someone else? When you excuse your behavior and protest, “I couldn’t help but be mad because they did this to me.” What you’re really saying is your anger is not your fault, but someone else’s.

The fact is, God looks at MAJ Hasan, and Bashar al-Assad, and Hitler and Charles Manson, and he looks at you and me, and he sees no difference, “All have sinned. All have fallen short of my glory. There is no one righteous. No one who does good.” (Romans 3) You hate? You are a murderer, just as these men are.

Others of you may readily admit, “Yes I am the chief of sinners. When I look at the way I lived my life… at times I did what I thought was right. I had made my own rules and acted ignorantly in unbelief. That doesn’t excuse it, I know. But certainly there is no way that God would forgive my sins, great as they are. I know that God is just, sinners will die, their sins must be punished, for he has sentenced the whole world to die.

That’s the sober truth that God led the Apostle Paul to see, “I am the chief of sinners.” And yet Paul could write, “**Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”**  (vs15) God did not condone Paul’s sin. He did not cancel his judgment. Instead, he sent Jesus Christ to come and be the guilty one. He was punished on behalf of the world. He received the death sentence on behalf of the world, because God transferred the guilt of the world to his Son.

Let’s put this into perspective… imagine if last week, during the trial, someone walked into the courtroom at Fort Hood and told the judge, “Remove this man’s handcuffs. Let him take off his orange jumpsuit and set him free. Because I am willing to take his place. Treat me as if I had murdered those people.”

This is what Jesus did for each and every one of you here this morning, what he has done for the world, even for MAJ Hasan. He stepped into God’s courtroom and said, “Even though I am innocent of any sin, I will be the chief of sinners. Look at me as if I were the one who hated and was cold and callous and unforgiving. Look at me as if I were the one who thought that I am not as bad a sinner as someone else, as if I were one who excused my sin. Sentence me to die as the one guilty of these sins.” There at the cross God’s judgment was made. Sinners were punished. Sinners died, when Jesus died on their behalf.

Because this transfer of guilt was complete, because it was satisfactory to the Father, he raised his Son Jesus from death and declared to the world, “You are not guilty. My Son took your guilt on himself. He took your guilt, your sin, your punishment, your death. I have raised him to life again so that you may always know that his payment was complete!”

God now looks at me and you and MAJ Hasan and the world differently. He looks for guilt, but cannot find it. He looks for someone deserving of death because of their sins, but cannot find them, because he made Christ Jesus guilty, because Jesus died on behalf of sinners. How could God do this?

Paul said, “**The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly**.” Paul had committed great crimes against Jesus – just as you and I have. But God’s grace, his love for you, for the world, is greater. A world full of sinners will not deplete the reservoir of God’s love for the world. **God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son…** No wonder Paul cried out, **“To the King eternal, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen!”** He came to save sinners!

Some might say, “But doesn’t this mean then that all people are going to heaven, if Jesus died for the world?”

But God makes it very clear through the Apostle Paul that this is not the case, **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those would believe on him and receive eternal life.”**

Here is the difference between the Apostle Paul and MAJ Hasan. MAJ Hasan, as far as we can tell, based on his confession, does not believe that Jesus died for him. He does not believe that Christ has taken away his guilt. Therefore, he has rejected the Judge’s pronouncement to the world. He has forfeited God’s gracious promise to him. The Bible clearly says, “**Those who do not believe will be condemned**.” (John 3:17) The Bible also says, “**Those who believe in him, in Jesus, will not perish but have eternal life.”** (John 3:16) The Apostle Paul, by God’s grace, did believe. By God’s grace the Holy Spirit brought him out of ignorance and unbelief, and gave him the gift of faith. By faith then, Paul believed the promise that the Judge had already made to the world, “You are innocent, because Christ has taken your guilt on himself.”

This is what you and I and the Apostle Paul have in common: you and I are the answer to Paul’s prayer. You are the people who by God’s grace **now believe on him and receive eternal life.**

God the Holy Spirit gave you the gift of faith through holy baptism. Faith believes God’s promise to the world, “Your sins are forgiven. You are not guilty because all of your guilt was transferred to Jesus Christ.” Faith believes it. Faith receives it. By faith you and I stand confident before the Judge, because we stand forgiven, we stand innocent. We will shout with the Apostle Paul, **“To the king eternal, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen!”**  He came to save sinners. He came to save me!

II. He called you to service

The second truth that moved Paul to shout this song of praise is found in vs12. In spite of my sordid past life, Paul says, “**God considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.”** Why would God consider Paul faithful? He had only been faithful at persecuting and slandering God’s name! Paul’s words mean that God made him faithful, certainly not because of anything Paul had done. God worked faithfulness in Paul.

But think about that… would you take a murderer of Christians and appoint him to be a Shepherd of Christians? No more than you would take someone like MAJ Hasan and appoint him to head of security at Fort Hood, certainly not! But in his grace, that is what God did. He called Paul to that work. Once a blasphemer, now a blessing for the name of Jesus; once a persecutor, now a promoter and proclaimer of Christ; once a violent man, now a peacemaker. **“To the king eternal, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever!” He called me to service!**

Hasn’t God done that for me? Every Sunday morning at five minutes to 10, I walk into this sacristy. After I put on my alb, I recite a prayer that I posted on the wall. Part of that prayer says, “I am not worthy of the office and ministry in which I am to make known glory and to nurture and serve this congregation. But you have appointed me to be a pastor and a teacher.” I know that I am the chief of sinners. I am ashamed of past sins. I know that I am weak because of present sins that I struggle with, and yet, the Chief Shepherd still considers me faithful, not because of anything Paul Horn has done, but because he makes me faithful. He called me to service.

Hasn’t he also done that for you? In spite of your past, he has called you to service. He has called you to serve your family members, your children, your neighbors, your friends and coworkers. He has called you to speak to those who still feel overwhelmed with the guilt of a past life, to show them the example of God’s patience: the Apostle Paul, me, you - and to show them that no sin is too great, but God’s love is greater. How amazing is God’s grace, that he would call me and call you to service!

And now, **to the king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever! Amen!**