**Stewardship Sunday Sermon Series – Christ’s Love, Our Calling: Love Speaks Precisely**

**August 4, 2013 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Romans 9:1-9 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**It’s Only for the Children of the Promise!**

**I. Not because of what you had (vv 1-5).**

**II. Nor because of who you came from (vv 6-9).**

*1 I speak the truth in Christ--I am not lying,* *my conscience confirms* *it in the Holy Spirit-- 2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself* *were cursed* *and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers,* *those of my own race,* *4 the people of Israel.* *Theirs is the adoption as sons;* *theirs the divine glory,* *the covenants,* *the receiving of the law,* *the temple worship* *and the promises.* *5 Theirs are the patriarchs,* *and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ,* *who is God over all,* *forever praised!* *Amen. 6 It is not as though God's word* *had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.* *7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."* *8 In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children,* *but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.* *9 For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."*

So there you are… at the check out, and you strike up a conversation with the person behind who also has been standing in line for 20minutes. The conversation evolves to , “So, which church do you attend?” “Oh, I attend Faith Lutheran Church in Radcliff.” “What’s Lutheran?” “Well, we’re a very stoic, non-emotional people. We don’t like change. We know what a hotdish is and how to make 12 different varieties of hotdish. The majority of us are descended from northern Europe.” I know that’s not the explanation you would give. I have confidence in all of you that you would give a clear explanation. You know what to say, after all, because you recite it every Sunday, “I believe in God the Father Almighty, he’s the creator of everything. I believe in Jesus Christ, who is true God and true Man, who came to live and die and rise for me. He rules as king and will come again to judge on the last day. I believe in the Holy Spirit who gave me life at baptism. I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and life eternal in heaven.”

Isn’t that a clear explanation of what it means to be Lutheran? And for all of you who were confirmed, you all stood here and confessed, “I am a sinner. But I will go to heaven when I die because I believe in Christ alone.” Very simply, “In Christ alone,” sums up Lutheranism, doesn’t it?

Why is it so important to speak clearly about what we believe? Because the Bible speaks clearly. It says that many will go to hell when they die because they do not enter through the narrow door, that is, believe in Jesus. Few will go to heaven when they die because by God’s grace they believed in Christ alone.

Not many people want to hear that, but it is God’s Word. Out of love for God’s Word, we, in love speak God’s Word. Love speaks. That will be our sermon series the next month: Christ’s love moves us to speak, and love speaks. Today, “Love speaks precisely.” Our sermon lesson is from Apostle Paul’s letter to Christians who were living in Rome, around 57AD, about 30 years after Jesus ascended into heaven. In this chapter Paul speaks precisely about getting to heaven, **“It’s only for the children of the promise, not because of what you had, nor because of who you came from.”**

I. **Not because of what you had (vv 1-5).**

Let’s look at the letter vs.1-4a

**1 I speak the truth in Christ--I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit-- 2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, 4 the people of Israel.**

Notice that Paul speaks precisely – I speak the truth, I am not lying, the Holy Spirit has instructed my conscience. My heart breaks for my people, the Israelites. I have kept praying, that, if it were possible, I myself be eternally lost and condemned, so that my own people, the Israelites, might be saved. Why would Paul feel so broken up about this?

He tells us in vs4b-5 (read)

**Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. 5 Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ,**

Paul’s heart aches for his countrymen, because they received rich blessings from the LORD, and still don’t believe. Let’s look at each of these blessings:

**Theirs is the adoption as sons** – out of all the nations of earth, God called the nation of Israel his child.

**Theirs the divine glory** – no other nation had God manifest himself to them in physical form. When you read the Old Testament stories, you can’t help but stumble upon this phrase, “The glory of the LORD.” For example, in Leviticus, Moses and his brother Aaron brought animals to be sacrificed on the altar in front of the tent, which symbolized the presence of God. Fire came out from the tent, burned up the animal sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD appeared to the people.

**Theirs are the covenants** – God made numerous promises to his chosen people; to Abraham first of all – “Through your family tree all nations will be blessed,” a promise God continued to share with Isaac, Jacob, David, through his prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Through these promises God reassured the Israelites that they were his children, and he was their God.

**Theirs the receiving of the law** – no other nation had been told by God exactly how he wanted them to live. God gave The 10 Commandments only to the Israelites at Mount Sinai.

**Theirs the temple worship and the promises** – other nations thought they knew the true God but devised other sinful ways to worship gods they created in their own hearts. Israelites had the temple worship – worship that was pleasing to God, worship that had meaning and rich content. Every Sabbath when they gathered for worship God gave them again and again the promise of a coming Savior, who would restore all that mankind’s sin had done to ruin this world and who would save them from sin and death.

**Theirs are the patriarchs** – other nations had famous people, too, like Plato and Aristotle, Alexander the Great, Pharaohs and other kings, but Israel had heroes of faith, men like Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David – men who were heroes not because of what they accomplished in their lives, but because by God’s grace they believed the promise of the coming Savior, by grace they were included in the Savior’s family tree, and they knew that one of their descendants, an Israelite woman, would give birth to the Savior of the world

that’s why Paul said, “**and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen!”** No other nation on earth could lay claim to these blessings.

This is what weighed so heavily on Paul’s heart: God had given his people, the Jews, all the advantages, all of those promises. They had everything they needed to know about getting to heaven as part of their culture. But they ignored it and rejected God’s promise of Jesus as Savior. It’s not about what you have.

You all know Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft? His net worth according to *Forbes* is $67billion. Let’s put that into perspective. Mr. Gates could spend $10million a day, and not run out of money for 18 years. But the Gates couple donates much of their wealth for good. For example: they help lower child mortality rates in third world countries. But in spite of their wealth and generosity, Bill and Melinda could stand before God on the Last Day and be sent to hell, if they do not believe that Jesus is their Savior from sin and hell. There will be a lot of people, who, when they die, will stand before God, and even though they had much in this world, and accomplished much in this world, will have nothing, and they will go to hell, because they thought that what they had in this life merited them a spot in eternity. But they have nothing, because they did not believe the promise of Jesus as their Savior.

You know people like that, who appear to have everything, but they’re missing the one most important thing in their life: the truth that heaven is only for the children of the promise. Like Paul, does your heart ache for a family member, friend, neighbor, coworker, for our enemies who don’t believe the promise? That is why it is so important that, in love, we speak precisely. Heaven is only for the children of the promise: those who are called by God through the good news of Jesus, by grace they believe the promise that Jesus is their Savior, and by faith they are the children of God. And that is what you are. You are God’s child, not because of what you have or had, but because by God’s promise in Jesus.

Paul then anticipates a natural question that might be raised…

**II. Nor because of who you came from (vs6-9).**

Has God’s Word failed? If most of the Israelites in Paul’s day and today do not believe and are going to hell, does that mean that God’s Word is inadequate? Is God not putting forth his best effort for his chosen people? Not at all! They still have all of the things Paul mentioned in the previous verses. They still have the promises. But Paul goes on to explain, **“Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.”** Most Jews today should be able to trace their ancestry back to one man, Abraham. That’s 4500 years of ancestry, narrowed down to one man in history – that’s amazing! But that doesn’t mean those Jews are Israel. Abraham had other children besides Isaac. Those children did not inherit the promise of the Savior.

Paul explains, **“It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.”** God’s promise fixed on Isaac and made him the heir of the promise of a Savior. If it wasn’t for God’s almighty Word, Isaac would have never been born. Abraham was 100 years old and his wife Sarah was 90! But the LORD spoke and said, **“At the appointed time I will return and Sarah will have a son.”**

God’s promise makes someone a child of God, not their heritage or family tree. Paul says, **“But it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring.”** A true Israelite, a true child of God, is someone who believes the promise of the Savior Jesus. Your family tree doesn’t factor into your eternal salvation.

Have you seen commercials for Ancestry.com? You can sign up and research your family tree and see which countries your ancestors originated from and see what famous people are in your lineage. I come from a family of pastors and teachers. My great grandfather graduated from the Seminary in 1911, my grandfather from that same seminary in 1945, my father and mother graduated in 1977 from Dr. Martin Luther College and became Lutheran grade school teachers, and now I carry on the Horn family name in the Wisconsin Synod. What’s more both of my sisters and their families and all of my brothers and sisters-in-law are Lutheran and are active in their churches. Something to be proud of? Perhaps… But what about you? Some of you have a family line of strong Christians. Others of you do not. Maybe you’re proud of the fact that you are a member of this church, and that you attend church, maybe not every Sunday, but you’re here, you throw a few dollars in the offering plate, you help out once in a while.

Why is it that God calls you his child? Because of your church membership? Because of who you came from? If God were to look at my past he would see that I really have nothing to brag about. In spite of my rich Lutheran family history my family tree is full of sinners. What would God see in your family history? What would he see and hear now in your family tree? Arrogance and pride as you look down on other families, as you gossip about them… For those sins God should not call us his children, but the spawn of Satan.

Instead, he calls me and calls you his child, his dearly, loved child. **“It is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring.”** You are God’s child not because of who you came from, but because of the promise, the promise God made to the **patriarchs, from whom is traced the human ancestry of Christ**, a promise God kept to the patriarchs. The Christ was born of Mary, a descendant of King David, just as he promised. The Christ walked this earth with perfect humility, not in pride or arrogance that he was descended from King David, but lived as a servant to all. That life fulfilled God’s promise - that he send someone to provide what was lacking in our family trees, a life of perfect love. The Christ kept God’s other promise, that he would send someone to be cursed and cut off from God. Jesus was cursed with our pride and arrogance, for our sins. The very child of God, the Son of God, was cut off from life, so that God might call you his child. That’s the promise he made and kept.

God’s promise to you is that you are his child, because in holy baptism he made a promise to you that faith was created in your heart. By faith you received Christ’s life and death and resurrection. God promises that you are his child as you approach the Lord’s Supper. Here he promises you that you will eat bread and drink wine, but also his Son’s body and blood, and attaches a promise to it: your sins are forgiven, you have been saved from hell, eternal life is yours. You are a child of the promise, you are part of God’s family tree, because of the promise kept in Christ Jesus.

That’s how we will speak. We will speak these truths precisely. We will speak as the Bible speaks, “It’s only for the children of the promise!” Thank God you are his child through the promise of Jesus Christ. Amen.