Stewardship Sunday – Christ’s Love, Our Calling: Love speaks sacrificially – August 25, 2013 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY

Based on Philippians 3:4-11 written by Pastor Paul Horn

**Love Speaks Sacrificially**

**I. It realizes the worthlessness of what is sacrificed**

**II. It knows the value of Christ’s resurrection**

*If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised* *on the eighth day, of the people of Israel,* *of the tribe of Benjamin,* *a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee;* *6 as for zeal,* *persecuting the church;* *as for legalistic righteousness,* *faultless. 7 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss* *for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing* *Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ* *9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law,* *but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness* *that comes from God and is by faith.* *10 I want to know* *Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings,* *becoming like him in his death,* *11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection* *from the dead.*

**I. It realizes the worthlessness of what is sacrificed**

Do you have a “me” room or a “me” wall? It’s a space in your home or office that displays your awards, trophies, pictures of when you reenlisted, certificates of recognition, diplomas. In our lesson the Apostle Paul seems to be showing of his “me” wall. The humble Apostle Paul… why is Paul boasting about what he has, who he is? There were false teachers in the congregation at Philippi who thought they were something because of what they were doing. They were Jews who had converted to Christianity and thought that they and all other new converts had to conform to the Old Testament laws and ceremonies that God had given to his people through Moses. They were erroneously putting their confidence in their works and their own righteousness to stand before God.

Paul said, “If we’re going to compare apples to apples, how ‘bout these apples? You want to stand before God because of your own works, because you’ve kept God’s ceremonial laws? Look what I’ve done.”

* *Circumcised on the eight day (I’ve been obedient from the start)*
* *of the race of Israel (genetically I’m the right one)*
* *of the tribe of Benjamin (I can prove my lineal descent)*
* *a Hebrew out of Hebrews (my DNA is undiluted)*
* *according to the law, a Pharisee (Pharisees were well known for being strictly obedient—and they kept many extra laws: 39 types of activity banned on Sabbath, observed 613 Mitzvot)*
* *according to zeal - persecuting the church (as if just speaking against Christians who appeared to be opposing God’s law was not enough, he persecuted them—talk about being passionate for God!)*
* *as for legalistic righteousness, faultless (no one could fault how Paul kept the law and lived in a way that the Pharisees considered blameless)*

Why does Paul, the humble Apostle Paul go to such heights? To show that he had everything! He was not some NFL player still looking for a championship ring. He already had it! He had the MVP trophy sitting in his trophy case. He showcases his “me” wall to prove a point.

vs7, 8, **“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish.”**

Paul looks at who he is, what he has accomplished, and considers it all a loss, all rubbish, garbage. Literally, what’s found in the baby’s dirty diaper. That’s gross and disgusting, but that’s the word Paul used to bring his point across. His life came down to priorities: what was most important to Paul? His accomplishments or what his Savior Jesus accomplished for him?

One day Jesus was walking along one of the dirt roads in Palestine with his disciples crowded around him, a crowd of people following. When out of nowhere a rich young man fell down on his knees at Jesus’ feet and he cried, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus replied, “You know the commandments: keep the Sabbath Day, don’t commit adultery, don’t steal…in other words, love your God and love your neighbor.” The rich young man replied, “But I’ve kept these since I was a child!” Jesus said, “One thing you lack… go and sell everything you have, give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then, come follow me.” The young picked himself up, hung his head and walked away sad. He loved his possessions and money more than he loved his Savior. He failed to see what had more value.

Do you feel that way about money? What’s more important to you? That the church checking account has more than enough money so that we don’t have to ask, “What ministry do we have to cut in the budget this year?” but so that we can ask, “What ministries can we enhance to reach more people with the gospel?” or is it more important that I spend my money, God’s money that he’s given to me, to make sure I have more than enough to do what I want?

What’s more important to you? Paul talked about his relationship with Christ and nurturing that relationship with Christ, through the study and hearing of God’s Word and receiving the Sacrament. That’s what was most important to him. What’s more important to you? Think about all the excuses you make why you didn’t come to church? Why you didn’t stick around for Bible Class? Why you didn’t get to your catechism homework? Why you don’t have a personal devotion time penciled into you daily planner? But you have time for your TV shows, your Facebook, you wouldn’t think of missing a sports practice or competition, you make time for your yard work… because at the end of my life I want to look back and say, “I’m glad I spent more time working on my house than being in God’s house.” At the end of my life I want to look back and say, “I wish I had watched more TV, so I could talk to more people about those shows.”

Or will I look back and say, “I wish I had told more people about Jesus, invited more people to come to church or Sunday school, Bible study,” but instead in my sinful selfish pride I said nothing, because I was afraid it would affect my relationship with them, when all the while I am withholding from them the one thing that is of value, not a friendship, but a relationship with their Savior Jesus.

What will be more important to you on the Last Day as you stand before Christ? What you thought was valuable in this world will be worthless when you face the grave, worthless on the day of judgment… what you and I consider as valuable, God considers garbage, that’s what God smells as he takes a whiff of your misplaced priorities and my unwillingness to share that valuable treasure with others.

**II. It knows the value of the resurrection**

Paul recognized this, took a whiff of his own accomplishments successes, titles and awards, they smelled…

So that’s why he said, vs8-9 **“I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”** Paul could have taken his “perfect” Old Testament Jewish worship life, brought it before God and said, “Here! Look what I’ve done. Let me into heaven!” And God would say, “No. It’s not enough.” Paul could have brought his stellar New Testament life, his apostleship to God, but God would have said, “That’s not enough.” That’s why Paul didn’t come with his life. He regarded Christ as his highest gain, his greatest treasure. This is what’s most important in life – to have a relationship with Jesus – because Jesus alone provided what I need on the day I meet my grave, on the Day of Judgment as I stand before the Judge. Jesus is righteous. Jesus provided the righteousness that God demands in order for us to get to heaven.

Jesus made his relationship to the Word of his Father his number priority in life. You will see that in the Bible. One day Jesus was in a house teaching, packed with people, they crowded around to listen to him. His mother and half-brothers heard about this, and thought he was going a little too far with his Messiah thing, so they went to take charge of him, the Bible says. So they sent someone to squeeze into the house and said, “Your mom and siblings are here and need to talk to you.” He looked around and said, “Who are my mother and brothers? These are my mother and brothers, they who hear the Word of God.” To Jesus, what was more important was his relationship with the Word of God. That was more important than what his family and friends thought of him. That’s the righteousness in which Paul wanted to be found. That’s the righteousness Paul wanted to know.

Jesus not only sacrificed relationships, earthly wealth, earthly power and popularity for us, in love he did not even consider his own life as more important than his Father’s Word. His Word was that his Son die for the sins of the world. And so Jesus did that! But this is the paradox we see at the cross: God turns his nose up when he smells the cross, because he smelled the sins of world, your sins, and mine, dying there on the cross with Jesus. But the Bible tells us that he was pleased with what he smelled, it was a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Eph 5). God was happy because his Son provided what was needed, the one thing of value, perfect righteousness, perfect love. Jesus dedicated his life and his death to you, dedicated his life to making sure you had what the Father demands, his righteousness.

And then Paul in vs.10 goes beyond the cross and grave. He said, **“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and attain the resurrection from the dead.”** What if you had control of Warren Buffett’s trust fund, if attained the status of president of the United States, or maybe your cheerleading squad won the national championship, high school baseball team took state - what’s more valuable? Knowing Christ? Yes, because Christ is life, and Christ brings life after death. Christ Jesus, the Son of God, died, was buried, and he brought his dead body back to life and lives today! That’s valuable – to have power over death. Wouldn’t you consider that the most valuable thing a human being might possess on this earth?

This is what is promised to those who possess Christ by faith: On the last day the resurrection of your dead body is inevitable and necessary. Jesus will bring you to live in heaven. Because you know Christ, you are found in Christ, that is, you were brought into a relationship with him through faith – the power over death and grave is yours.

vs9 -as Paul said, “…**it is through faith in Christ**.” Christ gave you the gift of faith through holy baptism, it is his promise to you. Through faith you believe, through faith you trust that Christ’s resurrection is yours.

Paul had been brought to faith on the way to Damascus. Jesus called him personally to be his apostle. Paul wanted to continue in that relationship through the study of God’s Word and receiving the Lord’s Supper so that he would always know and believe that he possessed the most valuable treasure on earth. He wanted to maintain that relationship with Jesus so that he could reprioritize his life - what is valuable, and what is worthless.

Transition: Since Christ’s resurrection is your most valuable treasure, what does that say about how you view your calendar, your scheduling? Last week a member asked me, “I’m not trying to judge anyone in particular, and I’m not trying to legalistic, but why don’t more people stay for Bible study after church?” I said, “You use to be there, too. You never stayed, but what made you decide to start coming to Bible study? Why is Sunday morning worship your weekly habit? You make time for personal devotions now, don’t you? What made you start penciling that in on your daily planner? Do you give a generous percentage of your earned income to the Lord through the offering plate? What made you start?” They thought about this and said, “Well, Pastor, it’s about priorities. This is important to me.” “How do you know this is important to you?” They replied, “I just do.” I can’t tell someone, “Prioritize your life.” That’s legalistic. The Holy Spirit has to convince them through the treasure of God’s Word that Jesus is their priceless treasure. I told that member, “Let the power of God’s Word convince them.”

What is most important in your life, what gives you purpose, what gives you comfort and strength, what points you to confidence you have in life after death, what is it that points you to your Savior who gives all of this to you? His Word - the study of his Bible, and his Sacraments – baptism, and the Lord’s Supper. But God has to convince you that your relationship with him is most important, so you and I will fight against all of those other things in our life that beg us to prioritize them ahead of our God. You know and I know that this is what is most important for us… and so you and I will prioritize accordingly…

Since you have Christ, since you have his resurrection, is there anything that you can lose if you share this treasure with someone else, if you bring someone else to sit in the pew next to you, or in the classroom? No. Nothing to lose… and everything to gain… Do think that there might be someone else out there who needs to know that the things of this world are rubbish and that their most valuable treasure is right here, in Jesus Christ? Because I want to know Christ, and I want someone else to know Christ and his death and resurrection because it’s the most valuable thing anyone can possess.

I pray that you continue to speak in love, that you continue to keep your relationship with Christ your number priority, because, my friends, that’s what love does. Amen.