

Stewardship Sunday
Lutheran, Radcliff, KY
Ephesians 2:1-10
Pastor Paul Horn

November 16, 2008

Faith

Created For a Divine Purpose – Good Works

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

So you’re driving down the interstate and you’re not exactly sure which exit you were supposed to take, but you take it anyway. Then you can’t remember if you were supposed to go left or right at the end of the ramp. So you go left. After two or three miles you decide, “No, this isn’t right.” You pull off to the side of the road and open the glove box....no map. Ah! It’s nice to have a map in the car to show you where you are going. Today, however, maps are not in high demand. With Google Maps or MapQuest you can type in your address, type in the destination and the computer will kick out a sheet that has your directions down to the last tenth of a mile. Google Earth even allows you to see the actual road you would be driving on so you can locate landmarks. And now a satellite will beam directions inside your vehicle. Your *Garmin* or *Tom Tom* GPS navigation system speak to you and tell you, “Turn left at the next light.” No more bickering, “I think we should go this way.” “No! We should go that way!”

Wouldn’t it be nice to have a navigation system or map for your life? All laid out so you could see what the future holds? I think that our President elect would like to have a map for the next 4 years. I think that our congregation would like a map to see what the future holds for our building project and stewardship campaign. I’m sure that Grace Lutheran in St. Joseph in Michigan and Faith Lutheran in Radcliff wish Pastor Horn had a map to show him how to decide his call. Unfortunately no such map exists for life. God doesn’t whisper in our ear when we come to a fork in the road of life. It wasn’t always this way...

In the Old Testament the LORD often spoke to his people directly through visions or through his prophets. The LORD would warn his people of future danger. “If you do not stop worshipping idols I will send an enemy nation to destroy you.” He would give his people specific details in their battle plans and reassure them, “You will win the victory!”

In his Word, Hebrews 1:1,2, the Holy Spirit reminds us that in the past God spoke to our forefathers at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he speaks to us through his Son, Jesus. Fortunately for us Christians we do have a map from God; his Holy Scriptures. The psalmist said, **“Your Word is lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”** (119:105) The Bible acts like a map in that it tells us where we’ve come from. We know that our first parents were Adam and Eve. We know how sin and death entered the world. Our first parents disobeyed the LORD. Thankfully God also mapped out the plan of salvation for us, beginning with his first promise, **“I will put enmity between you (Satan) and the woman (Eve), and between your (Satan’s) offspring and her’s; he (an offspring of the woman) will crush your head (Satan), and you (Satan) will strike his (Jesus’) heel.”** (Gen 3:15) Those gospel promises weave all through the Old Testament, pointing God’s people forward to the future, showing them, “This is the Savior. This is where he will be born. This is what he will do, bring sight to the spiritually blind, release the prisoners from their spiritual prison. He will comfort his people. This is how he will suffer, be crushed, pierced and lifted up. This is what he will accomplish; our punishment upon him, by his wounds we are healed. This is what he will do to prove that his work was accomplished; he will rise again and live forever as King of kings. The road map for the future was very clear for Old Testament people. For us on other side of the map, look back and see how God carried out promise in Jesus Christ.

Did you know that God’s Word maps out your own personal spiritual journey? In Ephesians 2:1 the Holy Spirit maps out the beginning of your spiritual journey. **“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.”** Yikes! That’s not a very pretty beginning. Inherited a sinful nature from parents, we were spiritually stillborn children. We were incapable of doing anything regarding our spirituality. We were unable to begin a relationship with God. We could not do anything that pleased our Creator. Nothing good came from us. The only thing we were capable of doing is trespassing, that’s stepping over the line of God’s law that says, “Do not cross!” Because of our sinful human nature that loves to sin our destiny is death and the destruction which is to come; to die forever separated from our God in hell. As we look at this map of our personal spiritual journey we might wonder, “How did I get here, in a right relationship with my God? Dead people certainly do not come alive again by their own will or power.”

Have you ever been to a funeral where the preacher turns to the casket and cries out, “Young man I say to you, rise up!” That body in the casket never gets up, does it? An amazing thing happened to you. God called to you as you lay in your casket of spiritual slumber, “Young man, young woman, I say to you, Rise up!” And you did. The Apostle Paul tells us, **“Because of his great love for us, God made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions.”** (vs4,5) Bringing the dead to life is something only God could do. God made you alive with Christ. Later on in vs10 he says that you are **created in Christ Jesus.** Our re-creation from death to life could never happen by our own efforts or will, but only through Christ Jesus. The Father sent his Son Jesus, pure God and yet pure Man to live on earth. He could not and would not sin. He could not and would not disobey. He did obey his Father’s commands completely. The Father

was well-pleased with his Son's perfect life. But there was the problem of sin and death. Something had to be done. The Father had to allow his Son, his beautiful Son, to be stricken, smitten and afflicted, to be pierced, crushed, punished, led like a lamb to the slaughter (Isaiah 53). But what the Father allowed to happen to his Son made you and me God's beautiful piece of art.

Paul says, "**For we are God's workmanship...**" The original Greek language literally says, "*For we are his handiwork.*" If you've ever been to a fair or festival and perused the crafts, sometimes you notice a beautiful piece of woodwork and you marvel at the fine craftsmanship and say, "I could never do that! That's amazing work!" In the same way we marvel at who were once were (dead in transgressions and sins) and what we now are (God's living people). Christ's perfect life has covered over our sins. Christ's suffering and death has removed the penalty our sins have earned us. Christ's resurrection has brought us life eternal. Through faith we receive all this as a gift of God's grace as Paul said in vs8,9, "**It is by grace you have been saved – through faith - it is a gift of God.**"

The map of Scripture tells us our past. The map now leads us down the road to our future. "**We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.**" The Greek is literally translated, "*God has created us for good works.*" Your purpose in life is to please your Savior with your life. Before Christ made us alive, by ourselves we could do nothing to please him. Now, re-created in Christ, we are able to do good works. Good works are anything we do as Christians that is pleasing to our Father. Good works are obeying his commandments; loving our neighbor as ourselves, loving God with our whole heart, soul and mind. We must remember that whenever we do good works, it is not to earn God's favor, or to merit heaven. But we do good works out of gratitude for what Jesus has done for us.

Your purpose in life is to do good works. The next line in this passage is even more amazing. The literal translation would read, "**God has created us for good works which God prepared in advance that we should walk in them.**" Do you know what that means for you? Everyday of your life, your Almighty, Omniscient Creator, has set up opportunities for you to do good works. You just have to walk into them and take action. How's that for a new outlook on life? Imagine that life is like walking through a long aisle of clothes on either side of you. Every once in a while you see a fancy suit or elegant dress hanging on the rack among the other clothes. You stop by to try it on. These good works are beautiful garments that adorn you as you walk the path to heaven. These dresses and suits are mapped out by God ahead of time for you to walk into.

Opportunities present themselves to you everyday, don't they, even here at Faith Lutheran Church among your brothers and sisters..... It's Sunday morning after Bible class. You wait for your ride to get done yapping with other church members and you look at the member picture board in the fellowship hall. You mumble to yourself, "I haven't seen so-and-so in a while." God has placed an opportunity for you to do a good work. How will you respond? Call that brother or sister and let them know you miss them. Encourage them to return to worship and the Sacrament. Our stewardship

campaign *Faith Builds the Future* is a huge opportunity for you to do a good work. Who would have thought 10-20 years ago that God would have planned for this time and this place for you, to have an opportunity to support a building project? How will you respond? There are good works outside of those doors that God has mapped out for you to walk into... A friend or coworker initiates a conversation with you about your church. "What do you guys do at Faith Lutheran Church?" Come to find out, they don't have a church that they're attending regularly. An opportunity for you.... a good work that has been prepared for you personally.... how will you respond? In the upcoming weeks of this campaign appeal, I want you to reflect on these truths. That God has designed good works for you to walk into, just like a map designer lays out the roads and streets for you ahead of time.

My dear friends, you may not always know where you are going in life. But you do know that you're final destination is heaven with Jesus and all the saints. While we wander this earth, the Holy Spirit does not whisper in our ear which direction we should take at every fork in the road like a GPS device for your car. He does direct us with his holy Word. In his Word he has shown us the past, what God accomplished through history for us. He has shown us the future. Remember now, as you walk through life, **that you are God's workmanship (his handiwork), created in Christ Jesus for the purpose of doing good works, which God prepared in advance so that we should walk in them.** You are created for a divine purpose: to do good works. Now...how will you respond? Amen.