

Sermon for September 21, 2014 – 15th Sunday after Pentecost

Galatians 6:14-16 (NIV84)

Theme: Let us Boast in the Cross of Christ

¹⁴ May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. ¹⁶ Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.

People like to boast. It's part of our nature. We like telling people about our kids, vacations, things we collect, or things we have endured. . . .

Even when people are silent they can still boast. A relative of mine once bought a Harley. Now, this relative is not the kind of person who went around telling people about what he buys, but he does like to accessorize. With his bike he bought about a dozen Harley T-shirts, Harley boots, jackets – you name it. My relative didn't go around bragging that he had a Harley. He didn't have to: his wardrobe did it for him!

We all like to boast, but in the grand scheme of things everything we boast about is meaningless. So what if the Packers are the best team in the NFL - how will that fact save me from my appointment with the grave? I have a Harley; but how will that comfort me when I grab my chest, having felt my heart's last beat? All the things I own and have experienced, my reputation in the community, etc. . . – what value are these things when it becomes clear that the inevitable last moments of my earthly life are at hand?

All boasting is meaningless since nothing we boast about can rescue us from the grave - all except one thing: the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. You see this is the only thing that has true value - giving my present life any true meaning and purpose and possessing the ability to rescue me from the grave.

Let us, therefore, **Boast in the Cross of Christ** – considering the value it places on us, and the purpose our lives have because of it.

Part One: Boast in the cross of Christ – considering the value it places on us.

Paul's letter to the Galatians was written in response to false teachers who were boasting about how righteous they were because, in addition to believing in Christ, they also kept Old Testament ceremonial laws. These false teachers were trying to convince the Galatian Christians that they needed to be circumcised if they wanted to be saved.

But the truth of the matter was – no matter how much these false teachers boasted about their own righteousness, they were actually trying to avoid the persecution the Jews were instigating against Christians. They cared more about what the Jews thought about them, than what Jesus taught concerning salvation by grace through faith alone.

The good works these Galatian false teachers boasted about were actually like filthy rags in God's sight.ⁱ Why? Because these "teachers" were in effect saying that Jesus' sacrifice for them on the cross was not enough to save them – that they were good enough to contribute to their own salvation. God absolutely hated their boasting about themselves and their works.

What do you think God thinks about our boasting? “I have a big boat.” “My kids are smart. I must have done something right.” “I’m a good person because I gave “x” amount of dollars to this charity.” Day in and day out he hears us boast – if not coming from our lips, then most certainly being silently spoken in our thoughts. Just the fact that no one else knows what your heart boasts about doesn’t mean that God can’t see your sinful pride and hear its sinful boasting.

And what do you think the Lord thinks about our silent, self-righteous pride? Does anything we boast about, according to our sinful natures, change the fact that we are worthless sinners when we compare ourselves to God’s righteous law? Who we are, what we have, and what we have done has no meaning to God. Our selfish boasting does nothing but make the LORD angry.

There is one thing, however, that the LORD loves hearing us boast about. It is something that he himself takes great pride in. What is it? It is the work His Son accomplished in order to save us. It is the cross of Christ.

St. Paul says: *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

What is the cross of Christ? It is the teaching of our salvation! We are unrighteous before God: by nature sinful and deserving of eternal damnation. But the cross of Christ teaches us that God does not want us to die. He loves us. So what did he do? He saved us. How? The Bible says that *God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.*ⁱⁱ Jesus, *having been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin*ⁱⁱⁱ won for us the righteousness we need to stand before God. But Jesus didn’t just stop there. He came to *do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself*^{iv}. God placed all our sins on Jesus – so much so that He seemed like sin personified in God’s sight - and God punished His Son for all of them. Jesus died. After three days He rose from the dead showing that all our sins are gone. *As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.*^v This is what the cross of Christ is all about and this is why Paul glories in it and boasts about it.

What does it mean to boast about the cross of Christ? It means to confess freely before God: *You, my Lord Jesus, are my Righteousness; I am your sin. You have taken from me what is mine and have given me what is yours. You became what you were not (namely, sin) and made me to be what I was not (namely, righteous before God).*^{vi}

To boast about the cross of Christ means to fearlessly confess with St. Paul: I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.^{vii} To boast about the cross of Christ is to fearlessly tell the world about his saving love. And why?

Because the teaching of Christ’s cross gives us a future. Jesus has overcome death, assuring us that our sins are forgiven and that we too will one day rise from the dead to live with Jesus forever with him in his kingdom. The cross of Christ has given us value, hope and a future. The cross of Christ also gives our present lives a new purpose.

Part Two: *Boast in the cross of Christ – purpose our lives have because of it.*

Someone might say: “I see the relevancy the teaching of Christ’s cross has for our future (when we face death) but what relevancy does it have for us now?”

St. Paul tells us when He says: *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

Because Jesus died for my sins and, through the Gospel, has awakened faith in my heart to receive all the benefits of his sacrifice, I am now a new person. I am dead to the world and the world is dead to me.

What does it mean that I am crucified to the world and the world to me? It means this: the things I once pursued – living only to benefit me and to selfishly get the most I could out of life, etc. . . – I now realize that such living is meaningless. Now I live for God – wanting to serve him and others out of love for Christ. Why? Because Christ lives in me.

Earlier in this letter, Paul wrote: *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*^{viii} Through faith in the cross of Christ I am able to fulfill what Jesus said: *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”*³⁵ *For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.*^{ix}

Faith in the teaching of Christ’s cross allows us to daily crucify our sinful natures through prayer and repentance so that we no longer follow our evil impulses. We ask the LORD to help us live for him since he declared us to be his children.

Our text continues: *Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.* The false teachers in Galatia made a big deal about being circumcised to please God. They boasted about it. But God doesn’t care whether or not a person is circumcised – just as it does not matter what your race, gender or socio-economic status is. It doesn’t matter what toys you have or hobbies you enjoy. None of these things matter before God. The only thing that does matter is the *new creation* that has been created in our hearts.

What is this *new creation* mentioned in our text? It is the “new you” that grabs hold of Christ in faith. This “new you” does not desire evil, but only good. It fights against your sinful flesh and rejoices in God’s promise.

And where did you get this “new you”? The Holy Spirit created him in your hearts through the means of grace: the Gospel in Word and Sacraments. For some of us this happened at our baptism as infants, when God (through this blessed water) washed us clean from all sin and sent His Holy Spirit to seal us as His own dearly loved children. For others, the Spirit worked through the preaching of His Word – leading us to see our sin, repent, and look to Christ alone for forgiveness. And when we confessed our sins, the Holy Spirit reassured us that we are forgiven, that we belong to Christ – washed clean and new.

Yes, Christians still carry a sinful nature that tempts us to follow the world instead of Christ. Because of this we daily fall into sin. But this sinful nature is not who we are. Through faith in the teaching of Christ’s cross we are the new creation God created and loves – his children who desire to live for him and do all things to his glory. This is why we boast in the cross of Christ.

This is also why Paul concludes: *Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.* God’s eternal peace and his enduring mercy belongs to those who boast in the cross of Christ. It is theirs through faith. All who glory in Christ, are the true Israel of God - regardless of their earthly heritage. They have nothing to worry about when they face the hour of death. When the heart beats its last stroke, the Christian can grab his chest knowing that the angels are carrying him home. When he feels the cold numbness of death overcome his body, he can fall asleep knowing he will wake up in heavenly warmth and light. When a Christian faces the loss of all that is good on this earth, he knows that, because of

Christ's cross, his God is still with him - leading him through all the mountains and valleys of this life: making sure to safely deliver him home to heaven. This is why my prayer for you is that, considering the value and purpose our lives have because of Jesus' work for us, the cross of Christ be your only focus and boast! Amen.

ⁱ cf. Isaiah 64:6

ⁱⁱ Gal 4:4-5 NIV84

ⁱⁱⁱ Heb 4:15 NIV84

^{iv} Heb 9:26 NIV84

^v Psa 103:12 NIV84

^{vi} Luther

^{vii} Rom 1:16 NIV84

^{viii} Gal 2:20 NIV 84

^{ix} Mar 8:34-35 NIV84