

Ascension Lutheran Church

Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of October 25, 2009

Faith Excludes Boasting (Romans 3:19-28)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen. The text for today's homily is from the third chapter of Romans. Our Lord says to us:

"Then what becomes of our boasting? It was excluded. By what kind of principle? By a principle of works? No, but by the principle of faith."

This is the Word of God.

Dear friends in Christ, we call this Reformation Sunday. It's a day to rejoice; it's a day to remember the grace of God and a day to be changed ourselves. The Reformation no doubt brings to our minds images of Luther nailing his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg Church door nearly 500 years ago in 1517. This event of course set off fireworks and set in motion the events that would eventually turn the church on its head along with society as a whole. The Reformation was a re-forming of the beliefs and practices of the church. It was a re-forming of how people thought about God and their relationship to Him. And this re-forming all happened through the Word that was preached and proclaimed in written form; it happened through the message of Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice. And this re-forming continues today in the hearts of God's people.

The Reformation was based basically on three principles; namely, that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. These three principles essentially recaptured the pure Gospel message that the Apostles proclaimed but that had become obscured in the centuries that followed them.

Now our Lord Jesus tells us in the Gospel reading today that "if you abide in my word," He says, "you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." The freedom that Christ speaks of here is a freedom from death, from the power of sin and the devil. It is a freedom of the conscience, a spiritual freedom. This comes from being saved by His grace alone by His sacrifice and this means we play no part in earning any favour with God. It is entirely Christ's work of redemption that saves. As Romans 9 says, "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy". Any good works we may do and are commanded to do are the end result and bi-product of Christ's work.

Friends, two things that are opposites cannot occupy the same space at the same time... light and darkness, truth and error, love and hatred...These things are opposites. It cannot be day at the same time as it is night; something cannot be true and at the same time be false, nor can someone simultaneously act with love and hatred.

Now in the epistle reading from Romans Paul also talks about opposites. He speaks about faith. In fact, faith in Jesus was the paramount teaching of Luther. He said, "God

our Father has made all things depend on faith so that whoever has faith will have everything, and whoever does not have faith will have nothing”.

Faith, Scripture tells us has an opposite. What is that opposite? Faith in Christ is what gets us into a right relationship with God. And no amount of effort on our part can do it. Only Jesus’ death and resurrection is the Way.

And so I ask you, according to Romans 3:27 that you have in your bulletin inserts, I would like you to look at those bulletin inserts right now - what is the one thing that cannot co-exist with faith? Anyone care to guess? The answer is “boasting”. It says, “What becomes of our boasting? It was excluded.” We cannot have faith in Christ and at the same time boast about our accomplishments.

Now boasting about our good deeds is the opposite of faith because it looks in the wrong direction, it looks at the wrong thing. “I thank God that I am not like the other people” – no, being fixated on oneself and comparing with others is boasting. Now we can boast in two ways; we can look at our own accomplishments and look down on others and despise their seeming inferiority or we can look at our own failures and despise ourselves. Either way we are looking in the wrong direction. Faith looks not at self or down on others. Faith looks up to Jesus.

Boasting loves to talk and talk about itself. The letter “I” is the centre of the word sin. The best thing we can do is forget about ourselves altogether and fixate on Christ and His grace and His work instead. As Hebrews 12 says, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith.”

Jesus is the target. He is the bull’s eye. He is the object of our faith. That means we trust in Him. We trust Him to save us for the sake of His death and His resurrection. Now, this must be combined with genuine repentance of course. For without repentance there is no forgiveness. We must first acknowledge that we are sinners and that we would be hopelessly lost if it were not for Jesus.

In Lutheran theology we use a term called the “vicarious atonement”. The key word here is “vicarious”. People live vicariously through others all the time don’t they? In sports for example, people cheer for the home team. I come from the Toronto area and I remember when the Toronto Blue Jays baseball team won the World Series in 1992 and 1993. People had Blue Jay fever. Everybody was talking about the team. When they won both years there was a big parade, a great big celebration. And yet, when you think about it only the baseball players really won. Only they played the game. But the rest of the city and perhaps the country, they felt like winners too. The reason the people felt like winners was that the Blue Jays represented them and when they won it was like we won also. And so the baseball fans lived vicariously through the team.

Theologically speaking the same things happens with Jesus and His relationship to us. We live vicariously through Christ. As our representative He lived the perfect life that we could not; He became man to identify Himself with man and by His sacrifice as our substitute on the cross He came to redeem us from sin, and death and the devil. And as

our representative, our substitute, He rose from the dead. This means that we benefit from everything that happened to Him. His grace, His mercy is what saves. As Jesus told His disciples in John 14:19, "Because I live, you also will live."

Friends, what do you see when you see Jesus? You see a sacrifice where guilt and filth are taken away. His bloody death was enough to make you clean. No, don't look at yourself to check. Don't check to see if you are clean enough. By our own effort we are not clean enough. Rather, look at Christ, the sacrifice, the sacrifice that cleanses you and strips away your boasting.

What do you see when you look at Christ. You see God's justice. Now how evil is sin? It is so evil that it is real and destructive and it cannot be ignored. It is so evil that God had to deal with sin. God would have been just and right to judge us according to our sins but instead He chose to show His mercy and love to His creation. He sent His Son take the judgement of sin upon His own body and soul. He took the consequence of our boasting and He rose from the dead. In effect, Jesus undid guilt and death. He excluded boasting because salvation is the result of His grace alone. Thanks be to God!

Friends, faith is silent. It lets someone else do the talking. If we boast then we boast of what God in Christ has done. Faith lets God speak. It lets the judge speak and for the sake of Christ say, "You are fully accepted; you are free; the slate is clean, you belong to me. " Look to Christ friends, to His body and blood, His righteous sacrifice. Let faith drive out all boasting. And so that with boasting excluded when we leave this place for another week we may have something very good to say about our gracious and shining Saviour. Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.