

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 This Is a Time for Boasting! Epiphany 4 January 29, 2017

By Pastor Kenneth Mellon, Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Pleasant Valley Rd., West Bend, WI

God's grace and peace which we have not deserved or earned are ours through our Lord and Savior, Jesus. God's Word that leads us to honor Jesus as our true source of blessing is written in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 These are Your Words heavenly Father. Through them show us Your gracious blessings in Christ.

Dear Christian Friends,

Have you seen any bumper stickers lately? They may say: "My child is an honor student at ." or "Let me tell you about my grandchildren!" We see bumper stickers for sports teams or colleges. And, this past year we've seen plenty of political stickers. Usually, people use bumper stickers to show pride in a person, a team, a school, or a candidate. There are also religious stickers, some good and others like: "Coexist", which uses all kinds of religious symbols to say that Christianity and all other religions, are the same so just get along. Those people have not been listening to God's Word. The Bible tells us: Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me!*" (John 14:6) Because of His claim, many people around the world despise the name of Jesus. They would never consider putting His name on their bumper. But we know better. He is worthy of our praise. Today we honor Jesus by saying:

This Is a Time for Boasting!

But, we can't boast about ourselves to God. We can be thankful that God has given us talents, skills and abilities and we should use them for good. But, at the same time we must admit that we have not used those talents as we should. The only way that we can be saved is by Jesus. Yet, if we have been Christians for a long time, we're tempted to think that God owes us something for all the time we put in at church or in serving Him. We may think that He should bless us more than others for the good things we do.

The Corinthian believers were tempted to compare themselves to the other believers and think that because of their spiritual blessings, they were better and more favored than others. They used their spiritual gifts selfishly. Others were boasting of being better because of who they knew. Some claimed Paul as their teacher, others claimed Peter and others claimed other Christian leaders special to them. Their boasting took the focus off of Christ! But Paul made it clear that their Christian faith did not center on their leaders or who they were or in what they did. He reminded them, "*Think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.*" (v.26)

Not many were scholars. Today, reporters interview people who are supposed to be experts in certain subjects. These people write books and are famous lecturers. But few of those scholars truly know God. Paul wrote about people with influence who could boast about connections. It would be nice if we knew someone who knew the governor Aaron Rogers. These connections may help us for a time, but later those people won't be around and nor can they always help us. Paul wrote about "*noble birth.*" Today that would describe "the rich and famous." They are the people who constantly have paparazzi following them. Even the common things these stars do become the news of the day, but they are soon forgotten.

A few Christians in Corinth were Roman officials and wealthy people who provided homes for worship. Even they knew that their fame did not earn favor with God. Paul wrote, "*God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him.*" (v.27-29) If we didn't know the whole story of Jesus, how many of us would boast of Him? Jesus was a teacher with no credentials. He was considered by His own people a traitor when He called Himself the Messiah. He was sentenced to be executed. If that's all we knew, how could we have a bumper sticker that said: "I know someone whose nation rejected Him and executed Him"?

But, God's way wisdom led Jesus from obscurity, rejection, and the cross, to heaven. The world would never think of winning heaven this way! So, the Bible warns that man looks at the outward appearance, but God reveals the heart, the truth. (1 Samuel 16:7) Once when God sent the Apostle Peter to a non-Jewish home, he was amazed that God poured out His grace in Christ to the foreign people just as He did the Jews. He said, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism." (Acts 10:34)

All people, whoever they are, have the same needs. We are all by nature spiritually dead in our sins. We have nothing with which to impress God so that He would choose us to be with Him. We need God's Holy Spirit and wisdom to know the truth. We need God's full acceptance to get into heaven. But we have none of these things on our own. In 1 Samuel we read that Israel's first king was a tall strong man named Saul. As long as Saul trusted in the Lord and followed His ways, he accomplished many good things. But, Saul began to trust in himself and not in God so that in the end he lost the kingdom. We don't want to be like Saul, boasting in ourselves and losing sight of where our strength really comes from!

So second, let us boast only in the Lord! Paul wrote that *Christ Jesus... has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.* (v.30-31) God's wisdom is beyond human comprehension. There are many discoveries made each year by science: genetics with human cells in pigs, medicines that save us from epidemics, and our vast awesome universe. These discoveries should lead people to think of their Creator. But, too people give credit to evolution and they miss boasting in the Lord.

Others seek to know "hidden wisdom" from God, what He has not revealed in His Word. People ask, "Why did God let the 9/11 tragedy happen?" They should be asking, "Why does God keep any people in the world safe every day when we all deserve to die?" We can't always understand God's timing or know why He allows bad things to happen. But, all people, including all of us should be searching the Scriptures to better understand God's revealed wisdom. From His Word we know that God has been working throughout history making promises and fulfilling them in Jesus. God tells us: "Here is My Son, Jesus, whom I sent to take the place of all sinners! He took your eternal punishment while on the cross and died to give you eternal life in heaven!" By God's Word we've been led to confess that we are sinners who don't deserve God's favor. By His grace we boast in the Lord Jesus who is our only Savior!

Paul wrote that in Christ we are righteous. God declared us innocent because of Jesus' forgiveness. In Christ we are holy. God looks at us in Christ and sees only Jesus' perfect life. In Christ we are redeemed. Jesus paid the ransom for all our sins by His shed blood on the cross. The Holy Spirit has given us this wisdom by His Word so that Jesus' accomplishments have become ours through faith in Him. Unbelievers think that the news of Jesus has no importance or is foolishness. But it is the very power of God that saves us!

When we compare our lives to Jesus, we cannot boast of any lasting accomplishments. Yet, since we are connected to Christ, God Himself will be the one boasting about us. He will be telling the angels in heaven, "Let me tell you about My children." So, the Bible tells Christians, "*Humble yourselves under God's mighty hand, and He will lift you up in due time.*" (1 Peter 5:8) Through faith let us continue to boast in the Lord! God has done great things for us in Christ. Let the world know! Amen.