

What is a Good Reason to Boast?

Galatians 6:1-10, 14-18

Grace, Mercy, and Peace from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Greetings in the Lord from the Campus of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. I am thankful the Pastor Eden is giving me the opportunity to bring God's word to you the people of God at Our Redeemer. My wife, Natalie regrets not being able to join me here this evening/morning because she is at home with our 9/10 day old baby. Our daughter was just born on June 23, and Natalie is still recovering. Just a note to bring you up to speed, we are moving to Orchard Park, NY at the end of this month to begin our Vicarage journey. All that said, I think it is time to dig in to our text today.

Today's message is from the Galatians text, specifically verses 14-18.

“¹⁴ But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. ¹⁶ And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. ¹⁷ From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.”

This is it folks, the end of the book of Galatians. I looked up the sermons on Our Redeemer's website and found that Pastor has been taking you on a journey though the book this season of Pentecost as presented in the weekly epistle

readings. I am honored to finish this journey with you as the book of Galatians is one of my favorites.

The story of Galatians is critical to the story of the church. The Galatian churches were some of the first Christian communities Paul started. In Acts 14, we find Paul's trips through the Galatian cities of Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, but in the time since Paul left these communities false teachers have lead these communities astray. The Galatians were Gentiles, not Jews, who had followed the Mosaic law their entire lives, they were free in the gospel of Christ to be saved by his grace, but the false teachers insisted that they take up circumcision and all the of the Jewish customs that came with it. They were led to believe that they needed to follow specific steps in order to be saved.

The Galatians ate this up and embraced this false teaching. They became proud about the commitment they made to God. They boasted in the act of being circumcised, as if their own physical sacrifice carried merit and worth in the kingdom of God. They believed that God wanted their suffering and would reward them for it.

This may sound weird, but people today love to suffer. Think of soldiers comparing their battle wounds, and boasting about how much of a sacrifice they have made. Some people build their identities completely on what they have suffered through. People suffer legitimate consequences of living in this sinful world, but then wear the wounds on the sleeve to make sure everyone knows. People tend to put a certain amount of pride in what they have suffered, the trials of life that they lived to tell the tale.

I will give you an example of one I am personally sinful of. I spent four years in Chicago. In my last year there we experienced a winter so cold and so heinous that I scoff when other people claim to be cold. We suffered wind chills of twenty

below. I had to shovel out my truck from under two feet of snow every day for weeks. You think I am exaggerating. I am not.

Do you see it? I just did it. I attempted to put myself over you, by asserting that my experience of winter was somehow more painful than any of yours. In doing so I am attempting to prop myself up. In effect, I am attempting to justify myself. Do you see the problem?

Ok, another example. I had mentioned that my baby was born not last Thursday, but the week before. My wife is alright with me telling you this. She wanted a natural birth. No pain meds, no interventions, a natural birth the way Eve had experienced it. This is a real trend amongst people of my generation. Everything natural is seen to be more real. Kids my age shrink away from artificial things, and go for the way things are “supposed” to be. Well Natalie wanted a natural birth for our daughter, but she did not get one. We had a long, drama filled labor that ended in a cesarean section because the baby had not been positioned right. She was in the wrong angle, and labor stalled, so we had to go into surgery. Now I can tell you that all three of us got through that night safely and happily, but it was not how Natalie had planned it.

She later confessed to me that she wanted that natural birth so that she could feel the pain and boast that she could handle it. She wanted that natural birth because it would be a badge she could show off to her friends. She wanted to boast that she suffered the punishment of Eve and survived to tell the tale. However, things did not turn out that way, and Natalie took it as God humbling her and taking that pride away so that we could be focused on what was really important. God had given us this gift of new life in the palm of our hands. None of this was about seeing who could suffer the most.

That’s what was going on in Galatia. They wanted to boast in their suffering. They wanted to cling to a law like circumcision because circumcision showed the

world that they suffered for God. It was tangible, it was external, and it was painful. What is a better way to show you commitment to God than feeling it in the morning? This is what Paul talks about when he compares boasting in the flesh rather than boasting in the Spirit. This is what angers Paul; this is the occasion for the writing of the book of Galatians. As any extended letter should, Paul provides for us a summarizing note at the end of this prolific testimony to the doctrine of justification by Christ through faith.

He states clearly, for us where the Galatians should boast,

“⁴ But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Jesus took all of our sins, all of our pride, our false boasting with him not to the cross.” The only suffering that truly matters is the suffering of Christ on the Cross. What we experience, what we endure, pales in comparison to what Christ has suffered for us, for our sins, for our salvation. The only wounds that have eternal significance are the ones Christ bore on Calvary.

There will be times in this life where we are called to suffer for our faith, but whenever we endure the pain that occurs in this world it should never embolden us to believe that it bears real consequence. Christ suffered to end all suffering, and when we face cold winters, or pain in our bodies our eyes should not be focused on ourselves, but on the cross. The boast that matters most is the boast in Christ.

So I challenge you, boast in Christ. Wear his wounds, as they are the ones that justify you and me in the eyes of eternity. Amen.

May the Peace of Christ that surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.