

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Lent 3

Quincy, IL

Saturday, March 6, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.

Rev. Martin Eden

Sunday, March 7, 2021 at 9:00 a.m.

# “We Are What We Repeatedly Do”

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

The Greek philosopher Aristotle famously said: “We are what we repeatedly do.”

In our Epistle reading today, Paul is talking about how Jews demand signs (we talked about that last week – they repeatedly wanted Jesus to put on a miracle show and Jesus wanted them to find Him in the Word of God.)

We hear Paul say, “Greeks seek wisdom” and “God has made foolish the wisdom of the world.” Paul is not speaking out against wisdom per se. He is not against wisdom or quoting men like Aristotle. Wisdom is trumpeted throughout Scripture. Jesus tells His disciples to be “wise as serpents.” There is an entire genre of writings within the Bible called “Wisdom Literature” like the book of Proverbs. Wisdom is not the problem.

The so-called “wisdom of this world” is the problem. The wisdom of this world says there is no need for God. The wisdom of this world says that if He exists, at most even if He is the One who got life rolling along, God is an impersonal force of nature, off in the distance, perhaps think of God as being the essence of nature itself. Paul says, “The cross is folly (is foolishness) to those who are perishing.” Christ crucified and risen from the dead is foolishness to the world.

Paul is not speaking against wisdom such as you would find in Aristotle's quote, "We are what we repeatedly do." On the contrary, Paul would agree. Aristotle didn't know how correct He really was. "We are what we repeatedly do." Therefore, clearly, I am a poor, miserable sinner. Paul says, "The good I want to do this I do not do, but the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing. . . Wretched man that I am." "We are what we repeatedly do." I am a sinner.

But God does not leave us to be defined by our sin. It is true, "We are what we repeatedly do." Except even this truth is made foolish in Christ in the waters of Baptism. We are baptized into Christ – once. That is who we are, a newborn child of God – period. Have confidence in your Baptism. God has washed you clean once and for all.

However, although you have received everything that you need for salvation in the new life, in the new birth of Baptism, that new life must be fed and nourished repeatedly. Your spiritual birth is much like your physical birth. You are alive through no act of your own. You can survive for a while with no help from the outside. However, it will not take long for that new life to wane away if proper food and care are not provided. Physical health and spiritual health each require daily food, care, exercise. Luther tells us that baptizing with water indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die will all sins and evil desires. "We are what we repeatedly do." Remember your Baptism.

Someone asked me recently what the most frustrating part of my ministry is. I said, "The most frustrating thing is not simple apathy, people just not caring – although the world is full of that. The most frustrating thing is being able to see obvious spiritual problems with someone and they are completely unable to see

that what they are doing or what they are not doing is causing immense, possibly eternal spiritual harm. It is like there is this wall blocking them from seeing the truth. And no matter how many times you hold up that mirror of the Word and Law of God, that wall keeps them from seeing the truth and the source of their downfall.

As I thought more about that question and my answer, in a strange way, this frustration is also a comfort and is what allows me to sleep at night. I don't have the power to tear down that wall. Tearing down that wall is not going to happen because I came up with clever enough words. This is the work of the Holy Spirit alone. I can't take the Holy Spirit and shove Him down your throat – feathers and all – as Luther would say. (O, that I could! My ministry would be very different, and potentially even more fun.)

God's work happens beyond our work. I cannot do anything to create faith in a person, unless it is a child you are bringing to be baptized. But then again, it's not really me doing the work.

This is where Aristotle is useful. "We are what we repeatedly do." Last week we focused on the need to be immersed in God's Word over time. Peter and the disciples spent three years with the Lord and they still didn't have depth of understanding until after the resurrection when He opened their minds to understand the Word – that is where God permits Himself to be found. If we claim to be people of the Word, we must be in the Word. "We are what we repeatedly do."

Why do we confess our sins every week? We are repentant sinners. "We are what we repeatedly do." Thanks be to God that He has given His church the authority to absolve those sins. "In the stead and by the command of my Lord

Jesus Christ, I forgive you all yours sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” You get to hear those words repeatedly, every week. You are forgiven. Speaking these words is one of the great joys of being a pastor.

Back to the frustrating part of being a pastor, I plead with people, I plead with parents who are raising their children outside of regularly participating in worship and the Word – and there is this wall. They don’t understand how they are starving themselves and starving their family when they have not heard the words of absolution in such a long time. Not to mention, eating and drinking that which Jesus says, “Do this in remembrance of Me.”

Then they will come one Sunday and won’t be seen again for a few months. They came and heard the Word – nothing seemed to change. The wall is still there. The sanctified life in the church (which is the Holy Spirit’s work in you) could be compared to growing older. First, you are born (in Baptism). This new life requires care, nurture, food.

You grow up. Having the faith of a little child becomes more of a challenge. How does your faith look on any given day? It’s like looking in the mirror. You looked in the mirror yesterday, you look in the mirror today, you don’t notice a change after one day. But after a year, five years, ten years, there is much change. “We are what we repeatedly do.”

The Word of God, the Gospel, changes you. The season of Lent forces you to look into the mirror. It requires you to see your sin, confess your sin, and find God’s forgiveness in the foolishness of Christ crucified. Only He can tear down that wall. Amen.