

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Sexagesima Sunday, February 7, 2021

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 342, 14:5, 367, 354, 370:1

Lessons: Jeremiah 9:23-24, 1 Corinthians 2:1-16, John 7:14-19.

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

There are many organizations which claim to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Some go by the names of churches. Some identify themselves as “evangelistic associations” or just “ministries” and many of those have the name of the founder or leader on them. One such organization is the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Another is Joel Osteen Ministries. An internet search of “evangelistic organizations” shows that there are many that have a man’s name attached to them. In fact, one search list of ten had a man’s name attached to four of them. Today we are not looking at the teachings of such organizations, but only their names.

Maybe they don’t want to identify with a specific religious denomination, but our sermon text suggests another reason. It could be pride. In this first chapter of First Corinthians, Paul has admonished those Christians for claiming to follow specific individuals. But he emphasized that it is Christ whom believers must follow. He goes on, by inspiration, to say ‘If anyone is going to boast, let him boast in the Lord.’ Scripture is clear:

NO ONE MAY BOAST ABOUT HIMSELF BEFORE GOD.

- 1. God chose the foolish things of the world to redeem mankind.**
- 2. It is because of him that we are in Christ Jesus,**
- 3. Who humbly came to earth to be our Redeemer.**
- 4. Our faith rests on God’s power.**
- 5. “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”**

Today the Word of God makes it clear and reminds us that God chose us and we really don’t have anything to boast about.

Surely you know people who can’t say much except good things about themselves. It could be boasting about their athletic abilities, about their learning or wisdom, or what they have accomplished or even how wealthy they have become, often thinking of how they did it themselves. That is the way of the world.

But Paul points to our Old Testament lesson where you heard ***“Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the LORD.*** Jer. 9:23-24 (NIV)

What does it mean to boast? It means to brag and to praise oneself. The Greek word used here is even translated “to glory in” and “rejoice about”.

Paul asks them to think about who and what they were before they were called by the Holy Ghost, enlightened with his gifts and sanctified. They weren’t among the powerful, the influential, the leaders in the world. But God made them what they are now: beloved by God, wise, holy and righteous in God’s sight and redeemed by someone who loved them and made them his own.

He reminds them that ***“God chose the foolish things of the world, ... God chose the weak things of the world [and] He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things ... so that no one may boast before him.”*** He did this ***“to shame the wise; ... to shame the strong, to nullify the things that [exist].”***

In the eyes of people who are not really believers, those who believe in and seek to follow Jesus Christ in all that we do, say, and think, are stupid, foolish and weak. Such accusations have always been made against those who believe in the true God and seek to follow him. Do you remember how Satan tempted Eve? He asked **“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”** Genesis 3:1 (NIV) Isn’t that mocking God and making fun of what he says and trying to belittle God?

So Satan and all his allies – the unbelieving world and all its people – try to shame, belittle, and mock the followers of the true God, those who seek to live as Christ commanded us **“to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”** Matthew 28:20 (KJV)

But look at the foolish way God has chosen to redeem mankind. Jesus used the picture of the serpent in the wilderness that was biting and killing the descendants of Abraham. **“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”** John 3:14-15 (NIV) It was only by looking up in faith at the brass snake on the pole in the wilderness that anyone lived. It is the same with any believer. It is only by looking up in faith at Jesus Christ on the cross that anyone can live eternally.

You don’t have to earn salvation. You simply have to believe that Jesus earned it for you! How foolish! And then you will want to serve God and bring to him fruits of faith and **“grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”** 2 Peter 3:18 (NIV) It is only with the **“knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”** that we can witness to anyone – to everyone – about the real power of Jesus Christ. **“God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.”**

Look at the weakness – in the eyes of the world – that Jesus displayed in yielding to those who took him prisoner and tried him unjustly and condemned him to death! He told Peter this was not the time to fight his captors with the words **“Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?”** Matthew 26:53-54 (NIV) Jesus could have fought but he didn’t.

He didn’t – and we shouldn’t – rely on earthly power, on armies or on large numbers of people or majorities – to win his struggle against Satan and sin and sinful flesh.

And it may not be obvious to everyone until judgement day that God’s foolish ways – foolish in the eyes of the world – and God’s weak ways – weak in the eyes of the world – really conquered and beat all the evil, wicked forces in the world and in the heavenly realms.

Jesus came to earth to be a king. Remember his words to Pontius Pilate? **“You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”** John 18:37 (NIV) In his way, God **“chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are.”** He was the all-powerful Son of God, who shall rule on judgment day judging all people who ever lived. Yet he stood before Pilate as a shackled, beaten man. Surely he appeared to be lowly and despised. He was born in a stable, a barn, in Bethlehem, not in royal splendor in a palace in Jerusalem.

God chose the lowly and despised things of this world to **“nullify”**, to do away with and to destroy the things that exist and are so important to men.

And so why is it that we, the followers of Christ, want glorious things – things like wealth, prestige, and honor among men? Such things do not always honor our Redeemer and can lead us away from him. It is our sinful flesh that wants and honors and values and even boasts in such things!

God certainly called some very wealthy men to be his followers and to advance his kingdom on earth. But that was not their real and ultimate goal. We think of Abraham, a very wealthy man who **“was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”** Hebrews 11:10 (NIV)

But we can’t really boast in our poverty either. In fact, Satan often makes us greedy and covetous of those who have more earthly possessions than we have.

In all of this – God choosing the foolish things of the world, the weak things of the world, the lowly things of the world – we find no reason whatsoever to boast.

But the way of our sinful flesh and the sinful flesh of all people is boasting and thinking that we know better than God. Sinful humans like to think when things are going very well for us that we don’t need God.

That's the trend in the world today. And all of us have that influence in our lives, something we must daily fight. More and more people think they don't need God. They have made idolatrous gods for themselves – a comfortable life, possessions, 'things', their own little worlds without God – using their time and especially Sundays to follow all sorts of things in the world. But you know that Sundays are a special time to gather around the Word of God even if it is only for two hours of worship and Bible class. People of the world feel that they don't need to dedicate any time for God and his words. They may think that they will come to him and hear his words when they are ready or maybe when they are sick and dying. They think that 'maybe someday' I'll want some words of comfort and then I'll call the pastor and have him put a Band-Aid on what's bothering me. But in the meantime I'm going to live my life in this world to the fullest.

But God tells you: ***"It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption."***

In him we find and have true wisdom that comes from God in heaven. And that wisdom is our righteousness. God has declared us 'not guilty' and has given us holiness. We are clothed in his robe of righteousness and he sees us as holy. We learn from the Bible how to live as his children. We have learned and are continuing to learn his will from the law, the commandments. Above all, Christ Jesus is our redemption. 'He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. All this he did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true.'

With the Psalmist we say: ***"My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice."*** Psalm 34:2 (NIV) ***"In God we make our boast all day long, and we will praise your name forever."*** Psalm 44:8 (NIV)

To be saved we need neither for ourselves nor for others any other means and methods but the old-fashioned Gospel. The Gospel is not merely the story of our redemption, telling us how forgiveness was earned, but it proclaims and offers grace and forgiveness to all who hear it. For this reason it is called the ***"Gospel of the grace of God"***. Acts 20:24 (KJV) This Gospel promise is free and unconditional, and through it the Holy Ghost brings penitent hearts to Christ. Thus through the Gospel the Holy Ghost works faith. And it is only by faith that we accept and receive all the benefits of Christ's redemption. Let us not be ashamed of this Gospel!

And if we wish to bring others to the knowledge of Christ, we cannot do this by means of human wisdom, or commandments of men, or worldly knowledge, but only by teaching them the Word of God in its truth and purity. Jesus plainly teaches us ***"to obey everything I have commanded you."*** Matthew 28:20 (NIV)

Paul was especially, acutely aware of the fact that God used his weaknesses. He wrote: ***"I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses."*** 2 Corinthians 12:5 (NIV) In writing about his 'thorn in his flesh', and we don't know exactly what that was, he writes: God ***"said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."*** 2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV)

So he wrote to the Galatian Christians: ***"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."*** Gal. 6:14 (NIV)

So what do you have to boast about? Nothing in yourself. ***"Therefore, as it is written: 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.'"*** And finally we must remember exactly how it is that we are saved. It is nothing of which any human can boast! ***"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast."*** Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV) Amen.

NOTE: So why did the writer of this sermon create YouTube devotions with the title "YouTube Pastor Robert Mehlretter"? There was no intention of pride. The goal was to find a unique title for YouTube devotions that could be easily found. Many YouTube videos used words including names of our congregations and incorporated the word "Lutheran". There is a reference to the website of the Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship, www.lutheranlccf.org on the last page of each video.