

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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The Sixth Sunday After Trinity, August 3, 2025

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

Hymns: 482 (417:7) 477, 463:1-5, 463:6-8.

Lessons: Isaiah 40:25-31; Hebrews 12:18-29; John 8:21-24

Text: 2 Corinthians 11:23-30.

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Fellow Redeemed in Christ:

One of the greatest examples of how God in his grace took a sinner and made of him a saint (a believer in Jesus) is seen from the life of the Apostle Paul. Paul, who was first named Saul, had been brought up according to the strictest traditions of the Pharisees. As a young man, Saul used all his energy to fight against Jesus and his followers. Later, in testifying before King Agrippa, he said, ***“I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth,”*** Acts 26:9.

Then the Lord took this self-righteous blasphemer and made of him a humble Christian and a great missionary to the Gentile nations. No one persecuted believers in Christ with greater zeal than Saul did before his conversion. No one served Christ with greater zeal in preaching the Gospel than Paul did after his conversion. There is only one explanation for this amazing change, and that is the marvelous grace of God, his loving kindness for Jesus’ sake.

Not only ministers of the Gospel may learn from Paul, but also all of us may profit much from learning about his service to the Lord. Let us learn about

PAUL, A TRUE APOSTLE AND SERVANT OF JESUS CHRIST.

- 1. He did not boast of his greatness, but of his sufferings and dangers endured, and of his weaknesses.**
- 2. He is an example and source of encouragement for all of us.**

Paul wrote the words of our text to the believers at Corinth because false apostles were troubling them. He therefore made a comparison between them and himself as a true apostle of Jesus Christ. In the verse before our text he writes, ***“Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I.”*** The false apostles were highly regarded by people of the world. On the other hand, Paul and his fellow workers were humiliated and despised. Therefore, Paul let it be known that whatever qualifications the false apostles could boast of, these same qualifications he also had. They were not ahead of him in any respect.

Actually Paul was ahead of these false apostles. In our text he asserts, ***“Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.”*** As a true servant of Jesus Christ, Paul was far ahead of any of those who claimed to be apostles, but were not. In service rendered in proclaiming the Gospel, in the amount of hard work, and in the sufferings Paul endured for the Gospel’s sake, he was way beyond any others.

When Paul was telling about this, he said, ***“I am out of my mind to talk like this.”*** The reason Paul said this is because of his modesty and true humility as an apostle of Jesus Christ. He found it most difficult to speak of himself in a boastful way. An example of this humility we find in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. He said, ***“I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I***

worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me,” 1 Corinthians 15:9-11. This was a humble admission that he owed everything to the grace of God.

Yet, Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit in what he wrote, felt compelled to speak of himself, his hard work and his sufferings. He wanted those to whom he preached to recognize him as the Lord’s true apostle and servant. He didn’t want them to reject his message as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul, however, did not boast of those things that the unbelieving world and the false apostles would count as being great. He says in our text, ***“If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.”*** In explaining this, Paul tells of all the things he endured that the world would count as weaknesses. ***“Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.”*** (The Law of Moses allowed only 39 lashes of the whip.) ***“Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea.”*** Paul was whipped five times. It didn’t bother his Jewish critics to whip him for preaching the truth, but they were very meticulous in observing how many lashes they laid upon him. One such occasion is mentioned in the book of Acts, ***“The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison,”*** Acts 16:22-23a. Three times Paul was beaten with rods. Another time he was stoned and left for dead. We are told, ***“Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead,”*** Acts 14:19. Paul also suffered shipwreck three times and spent a night and a day in the open sea. The Lord on all these occasions saved Paul’s life so he could continue his Gospel ministry.

In addition to this, Paul tells of all the dangers he faced and what he had to suffer on his missionary journeys. ***“I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers.”*** A map of Paul’s missionary journeys in our Bible will show the many voyages Paul undertook to spread the Gospel to the Gentile nations. He traveled hundreds of miles, by sea and on land, through all kinds of country. That involved many dangers. He was beaten by bandits and robbed. His own fellow countrymen, the Jews, hated him, and heathen people also put his life in danger. He suffered at the hands of false brothers who secretly and wickedly tried to keep him from preaching Christ to the people.

Paul also adds this: ***“I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.”*** The Apostle Paul did not receive a salary as a minister. He worked as a tent-maker to earn his own living, and received gifts from the believers to whom he preached. You can imagine how tired out he became working at his occupation as a tent-maker and also preaching and teaching. That way of life is very exhausting. How many times Paul must have lacked the proper amount of sleep and rest as he prayed and thought about how he might serve the people better. He was very conscientiously concerned about their soul’s salvation. He told the elders at Ephesus on his last journey to Jerusalem, ***“I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God,”*** Acts 20:27. He also told them, ***“You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house,”*** v.20. ***“Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears,”*** v. 31.

Finally, Paul says, ***“Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.”*** He prayed for them in his daily prayers. He earnestly sought to strengthen those weak in faith by his preaching and teaching. At the same time he was careful not to do anything which might cause a weak brother to fall from the faith. He also says, ***“Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?”*** He had the responsibility of caring for many congregations. People looked to him for answers to their questions in spiritual matters. If any were weak in faith, he felt their weakness with them. If any were led into sin, he strongly felt a righteous indignation.

Let us remember that Paul did all this, not for personal gain or glory, but that the Gospel of Christ might be spread to the Gentiles. In all these ways Paul is an example and source of encouragement for all of us.

2.

Not only pastors or ministers of the Gospel are to look to Paul as an example, but all believers, because we all are directly or indirectly involved in the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ. Humility is the first thing we should think about. Consider how Paul was so filled with shame because he had persecuted the Church. Do

we think we are better and have no need of humility? Let us think of our own sins and shortcomings, our lack of zeal in the cause of Christ. What have we to boast about? Do we not owe everything to God's free grace and favor given to us for Jesus' sake? We do not deserve God's great blessings that have made possible our eternal salvation. As members of a Christian congregation, we should think of Paul's words to the Philippians: ***"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves,"*** Philippians 2:3. No Christian should, so to speak, 'blow his own horn,' but humbly serve the cause of the Gospel as best he can.

Furthermore, let Paul's example be an encouragement to all of us in our willingness to suffer for the sake of the Gospel. We have suffered very little in comparison to what Paul suffered. When we do suffer persecution or hardship, let us not act as though we were being mistreated. Rather, let us consider it an honor, a reason to be joyful, that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for the sake of Christ.

Let us ask ourselves: How do we compare with Paul in our concern for the salvation of other people? Do we really care that so many people in this world are perishing and on their way to hell because they do not believe in Jesus as their Savior? Do we think that spreading the Gospel is someone else's responsibility? The Lord says to all of us: ***"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation,"*** Mark 16:15. If we do not feel able to speak to others about Christ, we can at least invite them to our church or suggest a visit from our pastor. We can give our offerings to help do the work of a Christian congregation. If only one sinner is led to Christ by what we can do, it is well worth all our effort.

May our glory and honor not be that we be recognized as someone great or important in this world. While we live, may we glory and delight in this: ***"God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us,"*** 2 Corinthians 5:19-20. Then at death we may rejoice that we will have heaven as our eternal home.

"There shall we thank you and adore with all the angels evermore.

Lord Jesus Christ, increase our faith to praise your name through life and death." Amen.

(The Lutheran Hymnal 125:6)

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