

Sermon- "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord" I Cor 1: 26-31  
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In the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

A sightseeing bus was making the rounds through Washington, D.C., with the driver pointing out spots of interest. As they passed *the Pentagon building*, he mentioned that it cost taxpayers millions of dollars and that it took a year and a half to build. While everyone was looking at it, a little old woman from Illinois piped up: "In Peoria we could have built the same building for less, and it would have been completed even sooner than that!" The next sight on the tour was the *Justice Department building*. Once again the bus driver said that it cost so many millions to build and took almost two years to complete. The woman repeated: "In Peoria we would have done it for less money, and it would have been finished much sooner." The tour finally came to the *Washington Monument*, and the driver just passed by silently, without saying a word. The old woman was curious. "Hey," she shouted to the driver, "what's that tall white building back there?" The driver looked

out the window, waited a minute and then said, "You got me, lady. It wasn't there yesterday." (www.sermonillustrations.com)

Sisters and brothers in Christ, in our epistle reading for today, “to boast, or not to boast, that is the question.” As we conclude our time together this week, I wish to plumb some of the riches of this text through the lens of boasting. Let’s look at four things: 1) the *inevitability* of boasting, 2) the *peril* of boasting, 3) the *paradox* of boasting, and 4) *boasting in the cross of Christ*. (repeat)

1) First of all, and very briefly, the **inevitability of boasting**. To be human is to boast. When understood as a synonym for praising, it is virtually impossible to avoid boasting. Go ahead, I challenge you to try it! We boast about, or we praise, the things we cherish and the people whom we love. We boast, properly take pride in, our children, our loved ones, our sports teams. We boast, take pride in, our churches, our church bodies, our theologies. We boast, take pride in, a job well done. National pride can also fall in this category. In a competitive spirit, Finns love to claim, boast, superiority over Swedes. In a similar spirit, American may boast superiority over Canadians in sports, and Canadians may return the

favor. Such boasting is, in the best case, passionate but morally neutral, or at least innocuous.

2) Not only is boasting, to some degree, inevitable, because it reveals what we cherish, the object of our praise, but there is, secondly, a significant and very real **peril to boasting**. As we are well aware and as Paul cautions, there is a kind of boasting that arises from sinful pride. Such boasting claims superiority at the expense of stepping on others, and insists on pushing them down. In Luke 18, the Pharisee's prayer is a prime example of such sin-saturated boasting: "God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get (vv 11-12)." In Romans 1, the list of those under the wrath of God, who have "become filled with every kind of wickedness," includes "gossips, slanderers, God-haters, the insolent, arrogant, and *boastful*..." In the Hebrew Scriptures, Prov. 16:18 cautions us- "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." Sinful boasting, if left unchecked and unrepented of, shuts us out from the grace of God. I am

sure each of us, in honest self-examination, have repenting to do in this area.

3) Not only was St. Paul familiar with the peril, the alluring temptation, of boasting, but, thirdly, his converted mind began to grasp, even rhetorically play with, the **paradox of boasting**. In our text, Paul spends the first half describing the prevenient action of God (v 27 “God chose, God chose” v. 28 “God chose) in order to lay the groundwork, the rationale, for his conclusion in verse 29- “so that no one may boast before Him.” Yet two verses later he insists, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord (v 31).” Well, Paul, which is it? Are we *forbidden* to boast, or are we *commanded* to boast? **Yes!** Paul is onto the *paradox of boasting*.

St. Paul had turned a decisive corner in his understanding of his own works and resume, vis-à-vis the work and infinite value of Christ. He grasped the *paradox*, that, on the one hand, there is a “*boasting in the way the world does* (v 18).” Playing this game, Paul was second to none and, in refuting the false prophets, readily threw down the gauntlet. 2 Cor. 11: 18, 21-27: “Since many are *boasting in the way the world*

*does*, I too will boast... Whatever anyone else dares to boast about... I also dare to boast about. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? ... 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. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger... 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 (v 18, 21-27)."

Such boasting "in the way of the world", however, doesn't get you anywhere *coram Deo*, before God. Despite having more reasons for boasting than anyone else, Paul concludes (Phil. 3: 7-8): "... whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. *I*

*consider them garbage*, that I may gain Christ and be found in him.” In himself, in his flesh, in the way of the world, Paul had many reasons for boasting and pride... but before God, they counted for nothing, he considered them garbage.

4) Finally, dear friends in Christ, Christians are those who, like Paul, have come to know this big relief, the immense joy, the comfort, the sheer grace of ultimately valuing, cherishing, praising, and *boasting in Christ alone*. After all he had gone through, the agonizing suffering and impressive list of merits, here is where St. Paul lands: “*May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Gal. 6:14).”

**Boasting in the cross of Christ**—its weakness as the power and strength of God, its foolishness as the wisdom of God, the cross as *our* righteousness, *our* holiness, *our* redemption. And so we come full circle. God chose the foolish, the weak, the lowly, the despised, the things that are not—you and I in our baptisms, but also the cross of Christ—so that the boasting of sinners might come to nothing and that the place of ultimate shame and death—the cross of Christ—might become a refuge of salvation, a river of life, for the life of the world.

The Church of Christ, throughout the ages, has gone out in mission to invite, like Andrew, like Philip, those who do not yet know Christ, or no longer know Christ, “Come and see!” Come and see.

In Mandarin Chinese, the character/ term for the verb “come” is LAI (來). Lai. Today, about 1.5 billion Chinese speakers have spoken this word: come. Parents have exhorted their children: come. Bosses have said to their employees: come (to this meeting). Workers have said to colleagues: come (let’s go to lunch). Come.

If you look more closely at this character, you’ll see something remarkable. The character is composed of a cross, in the center, upon which or from which are hanging three men: one on the left, one on the right, and one smack dab in the middle. Ever seen that before? Does that look vaguely familiar or remind you of anything?

And so the Chinese verb for “come” reminds us of our calling, our mission: we invite people, humbly, but directly and unapologetically, to meet Jesus, to come to the cross, to hear the promises of the Gospel: “Whoever comes to me, I will never turn away.” “For our sake God

made Him to be sin who knew no sin, that in Him, we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21).” Now **that’s** good news worth boasting about! Amen.