

“Boasting in Christ”

ESPN is known for showing the Top Ten Plays of the Day – a highlight reel of amazing, athletic plays. High school athletes put together their own highlight reels to show others for recruiting purposes. Today, it seems, that a great play cannot go unnoticed.

Even the mediocre plays – the tackle that should have been made – the pass that should have been caught – the basketball going through the hoop --- all, it seems, are an opportunity to shine the light on our achievements --- to boast before the world. What is common in the world of sports – often takes place in our everyday lives.

In his second letter to the Corinthian Christians, the Apostle Paul writes: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” (2 Cor. 5:10)

We confess that Christ will come again “to judge the living and the dead.” It’s true – each one of us will stand before Him, to give an account on the Last Day – but it is also true that you stand before the Lord this day.

What do you have to show for yourself? What account can you give? What does your “highlight reel” look like? Or, to use the language of the Scriptures – what do you have to boast about?

The prophet Micah asks a similar question in our Old Testament reading today: “With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the Lord on high? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

With these words a hush falls over the assembled crowd. Not one of us is willing to offer our firstborn. Even if we were to give an abundance of our riches – “thousands of rams and ten thousands rivers of oil” – whatever we might bring, pales in comparison to the sin of our soul.

As you stand in the presence of the Lord this day, the Apostle Paul reminds you to “consider your calling, brothers.” Consider who you were when God called you to be His own dear child. Consider who you were – not in the eyes of the world – but in God’s eyes. God’s Word tells us who we were when He called us:

- As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sin. (Rom. 6:11)
- The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. (1 Cor. 2:14)
- The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. (Rom. 8:7)

So much for our highlight reel.

When God called you, you were not wise, or powerful, or of noble birth – no, you were spiritually dead, blind and enemies of God. What did you have to offer – what did you have to show for yourself? Nothing! Nothing good, that is.

St. Paul clears the entire playing field – so that the only one standing is the Lord Jesus Christ. The spotlight is on Him alone. And the announcement is bold and clear – that it is because of Christ alone that you have standing before God.

You have not offered your firstborn as payment for your sin – He has offered up His firstborn in your place. You have not acted justly – He has acted justly, doing the Father’s will, and taking sin and its penalty as His own. You have not been merciful, or meek, or pure in heart – but He has loved mercy more than life. You have not walked humbly before the Lord – but Christ has walked in humble obedience, even obedience unto death, even death upon a cross.

Dearly beloved, it is because of Jesus Christ alone that you are saved. All HIS doing – NONE of your own. Not your decision, not your will, not your best effort, not your offerings. ALL Christ – ALL by grace – ALL finished in His sacrificial death.

“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high?”
“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

The Lord has not gathered you here this day so that He can receive your offerings of rams and rivers of oil. No, He gathers you to stand in His presence so that you may hear His judgment. But do not fear – for you do not stand alone.

The Apostle writes: “You are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’”

Dearly beloved, you are “in Christ Jesus” – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, so that no one may boast.” Having called you to faith in Christ Jesus – you stand before the judgment seat of God, today, and on the Last Day – as one declared righteous – made holy, sanctified – redeemed in the blood of Jesus Christ.

What is foolish to the world, is your wisdom. What is weak in the eyes of the world, is your strength. What is not worthy of any attention or merit – Christ crucified for the sins of the world – and that forgiveness delivered to you through mere words and humble water, bread and wine --- is the source of your boasting, and your standing with God.

Again, the Lord does not gather you to receive your gifts – but to give you His gifts – to give you His Son – so that you may not live in fear, but in faith – not just today, or in the days to come, but also on the Last Day.

In humble faith you stand with Christ today – your wisdom, your strength – and your eternal salvation. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.