

17 S. after Pentecost 9/27/20
Philippians 2:1-18 21A

THAT YOU MAY BE...CHILDREN OF GOD WITHOUT BLEMISH IN THE MIDST OF A CROOKED AND TWISTED GENERATION, AMONG WHOM YOU SHINE AS LIGHT IN THE WORLD, HOLDING FAST TO THE WORD OF LIFE.

Inquiring minds want to know: what did Pastor do on his days off? Well, I'll tell ya: I went hunting in the Badlands and it nearly cost me my very life. There I was, keeping watch on a creek, until deep darkness covered the land, when I made my way back to the ATV, only to discover the lights on the ATV were not working. Have you ever driven an ATV through the Badlands in the dark? Wouldn't recommend it! By the grace of God, I did have a headlamp, but even with that, I am living witness that it was not fun.

You don't have to drive an ATV without headlights in the Badlands to know darkness. You and I, My Dear Friends in Christ, find ourselves dwelling in the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death. It's spooky. It's scary.

And yet, in our Epistle for this Sunday, St. Paul appeals to us Christians to live as who we are, namely, "children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life" (v. 15-16). "Shine as lights in the world". That's you, Dear Child of God.

But, before you can shine as light in the world, you have to be a child of God. And as you again confessed this morning, you, by nature, are not a child of God; in fact, you are dead in your sin. You are like that 2nd son in parable, who just went and did things as you pleased. That is rebellion

against God. You wanted to be your own god. You did not love God. You did not love your neighbor. You loved only yourself and what you wanted.

But, God loved you, so you sent you Jesus. Paul gives a great summary of this Good News in our text today,

“Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Ph 2:5-11).

Paul is teaching us that the eternal Son of God willingly took on human flesh and took the form of a servant, just as Jesus said about Himself: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28).

Yes, Jesus is our Redeemer, who sets us free from our bondage to sin and death. He, the innocent one, bore the sin of the guilty -- that’s you; that’s me. For that sin, He was “crucified, died, and was buried”. He did that for you, in your place, for your sin. And, because He did, you are forgiven.

Yes, you were born sinful and unclean, but God in His grace gave you the new birth in Holy Baptism, which is why the Bible calls Baptism, “the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit” (Ti 3:5). Christ Jesus washed away your sins by his blood shed on the cross, and He makes the forgiveness He won on the cross your forgiveness, washing away your sin, making you blameless and innocent and without blemish in God’s sight, and making you His own child.

And that means that when Paul writes about “children of God,” in our lesson, he’s talking about you! Yes, you are “children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life.”

And, you know all-too-well what it means to be in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, because the darkness of sin seems like it will overwhelm us every day. Turn on the television or read the newspaper. You can see the crookedness and the twistedness of this generation on full display. Anarchy, mayhem, and murder continue, more fervent than ever, in the streets of our cities. Marriage treated as a curse to the point that two people of the same gender can be legally “wed”. We are rightly concerned about the ongoing spread of Covid-19, but turn a silent ear and a cold heart to the 61 million children murdered in the holocaust of abortion since the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision. And if any of you think abortion is not all about the money, I hold before you the \$ 30 million dollars Planned Parenthood spent in the 2016 election cycle -- \$ 30 million dollars to keep the slaughter of the unborn going. Materialism and greed and the love of pleasure are the top priorities of this crooked and twisted generation. Evil is called good, and good is called evil. That’s the world we live in. Truly a crooked and twisted generation. Hardly a safe haven for the Christian faith and life.

We are in the world, but we are not of the world. We walk in the light of Christ, not the darkness of this present age. We have a God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who gives us our meaning, our identity, our purpose, and our security in this world gone mad.

This is why Paul says, “You shine as lights in the world.” Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness”

(Jn 8:12). The light of Christ has shined on us, and now God uses us to shine forth that light of Christ. The world is lost in darkness, groping around, not knowing God, and not even knowing that they're lost and heading to hell. But, Dear Friends in Christ, instead of us bemoaning the fact that we have to live here, we can shine as lights in the midst of the darkness. And, we see the children of God shining that light every day. We see that light...

- the husband or wife, who on their wedding day, promises to love, comfort, and honor their spouse, to forsake all others and be husband or wife to their spouse as long as they both shall live and, then, by word and deed becomes a pious, God-fearing gift from God to their spouse ...
- the child getting ready for school in the morning. To his/her parent's question of "Are you getting ready for school?" answers, "Yes," and gets dressed and packs their back pack, thus honoring, serving and obeying those God has placed in authority over them ...
- the confirmed member of the congregation who is asked if he/she will, by the grace of God, suffer all things, even death, rather than fall away from the Lord. On Confirmation Sunday, they answer, "I will," and then they follow the Good Shepherd through the lies of the devil and the darkness of the valley of the shadow to be faithful unto death.

Living in Christ, we are like that 1st son, who said to God, "I'll do as I please, thank you very much" but then "changed his mind" and went to work in His Father's vineyard. "Changed his mind"; he repented. The Christian life is the life of repentance. Daily, we return to the waters of our baptism, to drown our sinful flesh with all its unholy lusts and desires, that we may rise to life in Christ, to shine as lights in the world.