

5 S. in Lent 4/3/22
Philippians 3:4b-14 C

I COUNT EVERYTHING AS LOSS BECAUSE OF THE SURPASSING WORTH OF KNOWING CHRIST JESUS MY LORD

One of my dad's favorite tv shows of all time was "Let's Make a Deal". For those that are not familiar with it, the show worked like this. The host, Monty Hall, would pick a member of the studio audience and offer that person, something like \$ 200 for the shoes they were wearing. Then, with cash in hand, Monty would offer them a deal. You could keep the \$ 200 or trade it for what was behind the curtain. Of course, the deal was, you had no idea what was behind the curtain. It could a blunder prize, like a bucket of sand, or a fabulous all-expensed trip to **Green Bay, WI. Come on, what did you think I was going to say – Hawaii?**

That's how the game worked. Do you think what you are holding in your hand is more valuable than what's behind the curtain? Or, not? Which would you rather have? What you're holding onto, or what you could have instead?

That's the question Paul is forcing us to answer in our Epistle this morning. St. Paul is saying that what he had in his hand before, while it may have seemed valuable to him at the time; now, he can see that, in comparison to what he has now is not even worth comparing to what he was holding onto before. Because now Paul has received as a gift what is of infinitely surpassing worth -- and something you can be absolutely sure of, as well -- and that is, "The Joy of Knowing Christ."

St. Paul says that he had some valuable things that he clung to, but now Jesus gave him something that he could never win on his own – a life of forgiveness, restoration, and hope; a life that has lasts forever.

Suddenly, all of Paul's advantages were nothing compared to the worth of knowing Christ Jesus has his Savior.

Look at what he boasted and prided himself in,

“If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.”

Paul was a true, blue Israelite, as good as it gets. “Circumcised on the eighth day”: Right on time, according to the covenant, just like it should be for every Israelite baby boy. “Of the people of Israel”: One of God's chosen people -- not a pagan, heathen Gentile. “Of the tribe of Benjamin”: Benjamin was one of the leading tribes of Israel, more prestigious than most. Israel's first king, Saul, was from the tribe of Benjamin. “A Hebrew of Hebrews”: Paul was proud of his ancestry and his heritage.

“As to the law, a Pharisee”: He wasn't just an ordinary Israelite. No, he had chosen a dedicated religious vocation. He was a Pharisee, and the Pharisees were the elite law-keepers of the people. And to make sure they wouldn't even come close to sinning, they added on their own rules and traditions as sort of a hedge to keep from breaking the commandments. And when Saul of Tarsus went to Pharisee school in Jerusalem, he was top of the class, a straight “A” student. He really knew his stuff.

“As to zeal, a persecutor of the church”: Young Saul persecuted the Christians, even participating in the stoning of Stephen.

“As to righteousness under the law, blameless.” Nobody adhered to the letter of the law than Paul. Nobody had a better pedigree. Nobody had a better resume. Nobody was more attentive or zealous or devout. Surely

God would reward Paul! Surely Paul had earned his way into God's favor, right?

Wrong! Dead wrong! And Paul now knew it. Listen to what he says:

“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”

All that impressive stuff that he just listed – Paul now counts it as worth nothing in God's sight.

What about you? What do you boast about and pride yourself in? What makes you, you?

Your money? Your stuff? Your opinions? Your awards? Your sexual conquests? The fact that people think you are nice? We do a lot of naval gazing, don't we? We find ourselves fixated on ourselves, our ways, our wants.

We find ourselves in the season of Lent. Lent is a time of renewal and repentance. And, God is calling you to repentance today.

Listen to Paul again:

“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.”

Our righteousness is not in us, it is in Christ. Only Christ Jesus your Savior will give you the righteous standing you need to stand before God and enter His heaven. On the 8th day of His life, He was circumcised, placing Himself under the Law. Because you could not keep the law, He perfectly kept it for you. And because you broke that Law, He took all the times you broke the law upon Himself and carried all that sin to the cross.

Upon that cross, He suffered the curse of the Law for you, in your place. He suffered and died for you, shedding his holy blood to cleanse you of your unrighteousness.

What joy is ours this day! We have just witnessed Remington being joined to his Savior, Jesus; as you were in your baptism. Christ has made Remington His own, just as He made you His own child and that means that His life is your life; and His life is everlasting. As He is risen from the grave; you, too, will rise from the grave. No, death, is not the end for you, Dear Child of God. Your future is life, together with Christ and all the company of heaven. That is what we are looking forward to.

So, for today, we press on. Paul puts it like this:

“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

We press on. In the midst of sufferings and loss, we press on. In the midst of waiting, waiting for answers that don't seem to come, we still press on. Our confidence in Christ gives us hope, gives us strength, gives us perseverance, for we are not alone. Christ is with us, giving us His grace as we hear and learn His Word and eat and drink His true Body and Blood. And, that means that we are certain our true home of heaven awaits us.

My Friends in Christ, with St. Paul, we know the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus as our Savior. There's nothing else that can compare. We have the joy, the great joy, of knowing Christ. We know what's behind the curtain. And that's a pretty sweet deal!

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.