

Sexagesima

12 February, Anno Domini 2023

2 Corinthians 11:19-12:9

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: “Lord, open Thou our hearts to hear, And through Your Word to us draw near; Let us Your Word e’er pure retain; Let us your children and heirs remain.” (LSB 908, stz. 1)

Servants of God,

The words of the Holy Spirit from St. Paul to the Corinthians and to us are hard for our ears. What man among us takes pride in his weakness and in those things in his life that appear to be failure? Boasting of weakness seems foolish on its face. And that is because we are filled with fantasies of self-reliance, intelligence, strength, and prowess. We thirst for success and seek it where we can find it. This evening, millions around the country will gather around the altar of the gridiron to offer up their chants of praise as they long for “their team” to emerge the victors in a battle of strength, speed, and athletic prowess. We pass out awards and titles for those who earn degrees and make the big sales. We love to be elevated and noticed and praised. We hate being passed over or going unnoticed. And in our day, if you want to receive the praises of men, the quickest way to do it is to despise the Word of God and glamorize that which is evil.

How foreign to our ears to rejoice in those things that show that we are weak, that we are nothing! What do we have that we have not been given? What can we actually claim as coming from ourselves? It is the height of pride and vanity and sin to seek honor and glory for ourselves as though our talents and abilities and successes are of our own doing or that they have been given to us to bring us glory. We are not to be running around trying to make a name for ourselves. Such boasting, whether it is in our own hearts or from our mouths, robs God of the glory which belongs to Him alone. He has made us and not we ourselves. He knit us together in our mothers’ wombs. He gave us our bodies and minds and abilities. He gives us our successes and our crosses that His will would be done, that His name would be hallowed, that His Word might be cast throughout the world. He suffered and died. He drew us up out death and gave us life. He baptized us. What do we have to boast in? What have we done for which we deserve honor?

It is the Lord God who has done all things and gives all things. To Him alone belongs all glory and honor and praise and wisdom and might and thanksgiving. He alone is blessed forever. Our pride and joy should be in His Name and His Word and in nothing else. He and His works are to be our praise. It is His Name that we should be seeking to magnify in all things. But how can we do that when we are busy seeking these things for ourselves? When we are seeking elevation and honor and power? When we are chasing after the praises and affections of men. We can't. It is impossible. If we are heaping praise upon men or seeking it for ourselves, then we are robbing God of what belongs to Him alone.

The man of God does not boast of himself because the man of God knows there is nothing of himself to boast about. Rather, the man of God boasts in that which highlights his own insufficiencies and inabilities. Only when I am nothing, then Christ receives the true glory that is due to Him. Reading the Old Testament you will find time and again that God very specifically directed His people to work in such a way that success couldn't possibly be attributed to anyone but God alone. The thorns that God gives you in your flesh are meant to keep you humble and dependent upon Him alone. Think of Jacob and his hip. Think of Joseph and his imprisonment. Think of Job and all that he lost.

What then do we have to boast in? We have things that the world despises as foolishness. We have a Savior who quietly endured mockery and blasphemy and suffered the cursed death of a criminal to save sinners. We have faith. We have the Bible. We have forgiveness. We have water and bread and wine. We have preachers who are not great orators and who suffer under the weakness of flesh as we do. We have crosses and persecution and affliction. We have confession and absolution. We have prayer. We have men and women who live quiet lives as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, son and daughters, employers and employees. We have fathers and mothers who pray with their families and read them the Bible and sing hymns with them and teach them to know Jesus. We have simple and foolish things which the world finds completely unworthy of praise. And we ought not be ashamed of these things for they are given by God and are pleasing to Him. God does not delight in the strength of the horse, nor is His pleasure in the legs of a man. Rather, the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His steadfast love.

Redeemed of the Lord. You have the Word which is the very power of God for salvation to those who believe. Embrace it. Rejoice in it. Do not be ashamed of a single word of it or compromise it in an attempt to curry the favor of the unbelievers. Resist the urge to make excuses for it or to try to explain away those

parts that your flesh and the world don't like. Do not resist the working of the Holy Spirit who strives with you through the Word so that you might be saved. Let His accusations squarely hit their mark and bring you to repentance and let the soft showers of the Gospel quench your parched and thirsty soul and fill you with righteousness and peace and joy. Pray that the Holy Spirit would give you ears to hear so that you may hear in faith, that you may be given a good and honest heart, that you might bring forth a harvest a hundredfold. Do not boast in yourself. Rather boast in God and in those things that bring glory to the Name of the God who made us and redeemed us. Boast of those things that show your weakness that the God of all grace and mercy may receive the praises of all men. Rejoice when the world calls you a fool because you believe in Jesus, because you believe every Word that He has spoken, and because you will not yield even an inch when anyone, regardless of their position, seeks to take that Word away from you or change even a single jot or tittle. "Goods, fame, child, and wife - let these all be gone. They yet have nothing won. The kingdom ours remaineth."

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace which passes all human understand keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.