

BOAST ONLY IN THE CROSS OF JESUS CHRIST

In today's epistle from Saint Paul to the Galatians he says a strange thing: "I will boast only in the cross of Jesus Christ." It is strange because of the "boasting" part of the quote. Is boasting an issue for Paul? IN another of his epistles the second letter to the Corinthians, Paul defends himself and his ministry by detailing what he has gone through for the sake of the gospel. He received thirty-nine lashes from the Jews on five different occasions. Three times he was beaten with rods. He was stoned. He was shipwrecked. He was pursued by all different kinds of people who wanted to do him harm.

He is putting up his experiences against what others have received preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ. Jesus himself had said to his disciples in one of his teaching moments that if they really wanted to be his disciple they were going to have to be willing to carry their cross. Do you think that Jesus and the two bandits crucified with him were the only Jews ever to be crucified? Thousands of Jews were crucified by the Romans. Do you think that Jesus lived his thirty plus years without ever seeing men crucified? Or carrying their cross to the place of execution? Do you think he did not see those crucified right outside the city gates as he traveled each year to Jerusalem for Passover? He was very familiar with this most Roman of public executions.

Jesus bids us to be willing to carry our cross. He himself did that and then was hung upon it until he died on it. How can he ask any of us to endure that kind of suffering and pain? How can we endure that? Centuries later spiritual writers would go even farther. We are somehow not only to endure the cross but love the cross. How can we even do that? Love that kind of suffering designed for maximal pain and humiliation. And then we hear Paul say he will boast of the cross of Jesus. Do you feel sometimes like you are missing something? Like there is this deeper meaning but you have no idea what it is?

We have to focus on the person of Jesus. It is not just what he did but what he allowed to be done unto him. He was the Holy One of God. Completely sinless. We who have sinned recognize that sometimes bad things happen to us because of the very sins we committed. But why should all of this happen to the One who is the Holy One of God, sinless as the world recognizes sin? There must be something about the person and the reason behind what he is doing or allowing to be done. The sinless one is allowing the impact and effect of other people's sins to

have a detrimental and destructive impact on him—personally. Why? Why would anyone ever do that?

Why undergo such wounding? Because the Lord looks at us and what does he see? He sees those who have been made by God all now wounded by sin in the world and then reinforced by their own sin. Jesus sees our wounds as he looks at us. Some of the wounds were inflicted by others. Some many years ago. Some accidentally. Some purposefully. Some were self-inflicted wounds. But Jesus does not care so much about who did the wounding as he is in healing the wounds that have been inflicted. “By his wounds we are healed, says the Scripture.” How can that be? It can be, not because he suffers and dies on the cross. It can be because Jesus rises from the dead. The grave cannot hold him. He who died a horrendous death bursts forth from the tomb on the third day and is now full of life, never to die again.

For Paul the meaning of the cross goes beyond the suffering and ignominy. It goes to the “why” of Jesus enduring and accepting such suffering despite his innocence. Why would someone do that? Because they have the power to heal not just some but all the wounds ever inflicted on people. Because he has the power to restore them to their original innocence. Because there is a power in him that cannot be defeated—by anything. Not sin. Not death. It is the power of love and that power actually was unleashed right there on Calvary. The power is a transforming power. It changes people. It can change the human heart. It can make sinful hearts like unto his own. It actually has the power to heal. All the wounds. Other inflicted or self-inflicted.

And when we experience this and begin to realize the truth of this, it changes us. We begin to believe and we begin to realize that we ourselves would do the same thing for those we love that Jesus did for us. And once we begin to believe, and once we begin to realize the good we are actually doing, by the grace of God, it changes us. And then we begin to tell the story. It is not just about me or us. Others matter. It is for others who have been wounded and need to be healed. And those very ones, whom we know, are part of the harvest that is plentiful. And we are part of the laborers who are scarce. We need each other to see us through to the end. My friends, we are closer than we know. We are all being healed by the wounds he endured for us. Let us boast in that too.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.