

WHAT DO YOU BOAST ABOUT?

Romans 5: 1-5

What do you boast about? Maybe we're embarrassed to admit that we boast. Maybe we're too self-conscious to do it openly. Maybe we do it secretly, in our hearts or in other ways, like through social media posts or less publicly with friends. But boasting is so much something we do in this part of the world, a world of privilege and prosperity, a world of rich possibilities and resources...

Do we boast about our successes or those of our children or our extended family or friends? Do we boast about our background, our cultural heritage? Do we boast about our accomplishments and achievements, the money we have, the things we own, our careers and promotions, the people we know, the friends we have, our fitness, style, beauty, talent?... I can go on and on, because the one thing in common here is not the focus of our boasting but the inclination and act of boasting itself.

So why is it a problem? It's a problem because it blinds us. Boasting blinds us to how our boasting makes other people feel. It can make them feel deficient in some way, inadequate, lesser. It encourages others to be as narcissistic and self-absorbed as we are. Or it can encourage others to develop a competitive attitude, imitating our boasting by doing it themselves. Boasting also blinds us to ourselves and the truth of the fear and insecurity we carry deep within us. Will we be accepted as we are or do we have to prove ourselves? Whether it's our family, friends, successes, accomplishments and possessions, somehow, at some level we believe this will make us worthy and special, deserving of love. It also deceives us into hiding those parts of us we're less proud of, even afraid or ashamed of.

So what's the alternative? The apostle Paul offers a whole other vision for living life far more fulfilled and far more truthful and real. He, too, talks of boasting. But he turns the conventional act of boasting on its head. Paul is addressing those Jews like himself as well as non-Jews who build their life worth around their culture, status and accomplishments and the boasting that goes along with all that. They can boast about their culture and race and their heritage as chosen by God with a special covenant. Or they can boast about their status and success in society making them somehow more special before God and others.

But that's not the way it works, says Paul. If you're going to boast, boast about how the love of God has found you in the depths of your soul where fear and inadequacy live, and how grateful you are that you have found new strength and hope in your life through an energy beyond your own human resources alone. In fact, Paul says, since you are finding a deeper

peace through faith in God's love for you beyond anything you have done or can do for it, boast in your new found assurance of sharing in God's glory rather than your own glory.

And not only that, says Paul. Boast in how your suffering has not made you a more bitter or defeated a human being, but how with God's love and strength in your soul your suffering has been converted into a capacity for greater endurance, because you're able to handle it better and don't get as overwhelmed by it. And developing endurance leads to character which is like resilience and stability. And character as resilience and stability is converted into hope which is a positivity about the possibilities in the future even though life can be scary and hard. And hope is not lost when hard times come because a larger power Paul names the Holy Spirit keeps pouring love in your heart – love for yourself because you are loved.

You don't have to be some spectacular human being in the eyes of others. You're starting point is your infinite value and worth in God's eyes who knows you in all your truth; no need to hide, no need to boast about yourself. Boast about what God is doing in your life. Start a counter-cultural trend and help guide people to seek out a better foundation for their worth and better relationships where it's not just about me, myself and my own. It's now about a greater power and energy in your life, transforming you and making a difference in the lives of others through what's happening in you.

So, you can boast about yourself and what you have done and can do or you can boast about God and what God has done and can do in and through your life. Which path do you think will give you the greater peace, fullness and joy? We're all going to suffer, fail and lose something in our lives. Isn't it better to build our foundation on more solid ground than deceiving ourselves and others who will listen to us in our boasting? Isn't it more worthwhile engaging the places of suffering in us so that they may be converted to endurance and then character and then hope and then more love which keeps feeding the hope?

May we experience some liberation and some redirection, purging our false sources of self-worth in our boasting. And let us create new space for genuine love to be poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

Amen.