**Boast In Weakness**

**2 Corinthians 11:19-12:9**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Of what do you boast? Here’s a couple of mine! Wow, what a congregation I serve – for 20 years of being their pastor, they gave me this incredible Citizen watch! I know about 15 streams that are tributaries off Lake Michigan or Green Bay, soon the Steelhead run will begin, it is always a challenge to figure out which one to fish.

So, what do you boast about?

Bow season is finally over, but the guys are still talking at archery league about the deer season. There were some big bucks shot, a whopping 8-pointer with huge tines. Pictures were flashed of 10, 12, and even a gorgeous 14 pointer.

Finally, one guy pipes up, “You should see the picture of mine this year.” He whips out the pictures of a little spike horn, they barely made it 2 inches tall, and if the deer was 75 pounds live weight, that was being generous.

Who in their right mind would boast about such a deer?

The girls are bragging about their latest finds, showing off their shopping skills, how they got such a great deal on their latest outfits – 40%, 50%, and even 65% off the “manufacturer’s suggested retail” price. They were boasting about how they had paid as little as $12 for a new slacks suit when one of them boldly brags, “You should see what I picked up, it was on the damaged and returned merchandise rack, I got it for $150.”

Are you nuts? Who’d boast about getting something off the damaged and returned rack for $150?

However, to be fair, that sounds a lot like the boasting of the Apostle Paul in our text. Listen to it. He is a servant of Christ, he says, “*with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.”*

Is this stuff to boast about? Maybe in that sick, guy, mentality like in the movie *Jaws.* Do you remember when Quint and Hooper are sitting in the boat’s galley with chief Brody and they start showing off their scars, boasting about what sharks had done to them? Brody is looking at them like they are crazy.

Do people really like to boast about their weaknesses.? There is no glory in talking about our failings, our short-comings, our stupid moments, or the things which show off our weaknesses. We live in a society and world that honors success and gives kudos to those who excel at things. At the basketball banquet they are not going to give out an award to the person who had the ball stolen from them the most, nor to the players who had the highest percentage of ***missed*** shots or ***missed*** free throws.

About what should you boast? By the world’s standards, we should boast about our accomplishments and our great successes – the monster buck, the steal of a deal while shopping, the most points in a season by a player at Paduka High.

It appears that according to Paul, we are to go completely against the thinking of this world. But our text is God’s Word, not Paul’s, it was only penned by Paul. According to our text, we are not to boast in anything ***excep***t our weaknesses. This is counter-intuitive! Why is it that we should boast in our weaknesses? Because it is in our weaknesses that God is pre-eminent, in our weaknesses God receives all the glory.

But boasting is in our nature. I know pastors who boast about how many they have brought to Christ. In fact, there are awards sometimes given to those who have brought the most to Christ.

Do you know how many I have brought to Christ? I have been a pastor for almost 27 years, before that I was a Lutheran School teacher for 4 years. So, any guesses about how many I have brought to Christ? What do you think? More or less than 100? Less! More or less than 50? Less! More or less than 25? Less! More or less than 10? Less! In fact, ***I*** have brought zero people to Christ.

Some of you are probably thinking, “Maybe we ought to get a new Pastor, he is not doing his job.” Consider this. If someone comes to faith, is it because of what I did? Do I have the power to make anybody a believer?

Dearly beloved of God, it is the Holy Spirit who works faith and changes hearts, not me – not any pastor. And if someone rejects that Word, they are resisting the Holy Spirit. I may sow the seed of the Word, but those who believe, do so because the Holy Spirit changed their heart into a believing heart.

Our Old Testament lesson says that when His word goes out from His mouth: It will not return to Him empty, but will accomplish what He desires and achieve the purpose for which He sent it.

And Jesus explains who it is that is really heard or rejected when the under-shepherds faithfully speak His word. He says, "The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me." (Luke 10:16)

In regard to the things of God, there is no boasting. Nobody chooses to believe in God, nobody makes a decision for Jesus. Luther explain how it happens in the Small Catechism, the Third Article of the Creed. He begins with these words. *I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.*

Even faith is nothing I can boast about, for it is the Spirit’s work in the Gospel, that is, through Word and Sacrament. It is God’s work through these means of His grace which brought me to faith.

The same is true for you, it is not your work, you have nothing about which you can boast, for it is *In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.*

Everything I have is God’s gift to me; my wife, my children, the roof over my head, the food on my table, even my very life are all God’s gift to me. Every bit of talent and ability I have are God’s gifts to me. Every possession and all my financial resources are God’s gifts to me. Even the faith that I profess before you all is nothing more than God’s gracious gift to me – God’s gift of faith.

How we all like to boast, even of these things of God. But our boasting of what we have done in the faith is a false bravado. Such boasting is a lie – a violation of the 8th Commandment. Such boasting robs the Holy Spirit of the glory that belongs to God – a violation of the 7th Commandment. Our boasting of our faith as our own work is to put our trust in ourselves – a violation of the 1st Commandment – you might even say that it is a form of worshipping self. We like to feel that we do not need everything God has to give to us in Christ Jesus, that we can skip out of worship once in a while – a violation of the 3rd Commandment.

Wow, thanks be to our heavenly Father that He sent His only begotten Son. Jesus never boasted, never took credit for anything, but gave all glory to His Father. Even when others tried to give Him honor and glory, He directed it away from Himself and to His Father.

We like to boast though that we are pretty good people – we are not – we are sinners. Thankfully, even though we would rather not admit that, our service led us to confess our failings, we boasted in our weakness. We claimed that we are poor, miserable sinners. In fact, we professed the profound truth that we are by nature, sinful and unclean.

Now, dear friends, that is something worth boasting about. There is weakness we can boast of. We can boast of the weakness of our sinful nature because it gives all glory to God, and the power of Christ rests upon us.

Boasting in our weakness, claiming that we are sinners, means we do not trust ourselves, but cling solely to Christ.

Christ’s perfect humility He allowed to be nailed to the cross, sacrificed there for you and me. Upon the cross was nailed our arrogant boasting which would cling to our own failings. Your sinfulness and mine was taken to the cross in the very flesh of Christ where He put it to death for us.

Boast in weaknesses that the power of Christ rests upon us. Say it with all confidence, “I am a sinner, that is my greatest weakness.” For in the confidence of your confession, God’s greatest gift comes to you. Sinfulness is gone, removed from you in the Word of forgiveness Christ has spoken through His pastor.

Boast in your weakness that the power of Christ rests upon you. In the Word which is proclaimed, Christ comes to you and your faith is made strong by the Spirit’s presence.

Boast in your weakness that the power of Christ rests upon you. Come to the table that Christ sets before the repentant. Christ feeds you His holy body and gives you to drink of His precious blood. As you eat and drink, nothing of your sinful weaknesses remain within you as Christ fills you with His life, expelling sin and death from you.

Yes, I will boast in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me –unto life everlasting. So also, boast in yours, that the power of Christ may rest upon you – unto life everlasting. Amen.