

Sermon Reading: Galatians 6:12-16

Sermon Theme: Christians Boast!

Last year was the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther nailing 95 theses—or statements—to the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. He did it all for the sake of starting a discussion concerning practices in the Roman Catholic Church. Lutherans all over the world celebrated how God used this man Martin Luther to reform his church that had been deformed with false teaching. Last year, especially, there was a feeling of pride with being Lutheran!

How much of that is present today? Reformation Day was on Wednesday, how did you celebrate it? Did you remember it? This isn't to shame anyone; the reality is that unless you are familiar with the Reformation and what it is, it may have skipped your mind with the onslaught of candy and goodies. But how proud are we of our Lutheran heritage and what it means to be a Lutheran? Maybe a better question is, what are we proud about with being a Lutheran? Maybe there isn't a whole lot of pride but instead a little shame: "Yeah, I belong to that conservative church. No, we don't think we are better than everyone else." Or is it only being proud of the name? Every now and then you might run into someone who, when asked what church they belong to, they will say "I'm a Lutheran." But really it's only in name and personal claim.

What is your pride in? Where is your boast? What are you expressing your confidence in? Too often that pride comes from and starts with where our name is at, what it's on, or maybe even what church body one belongs to. Or it's in our personal accomplishments, our relationships with certain people, our connections within the community and the world around us, or our social status. Today the apostle Paul teaches us that Christians do have something to put our pride in; in fact, Christians boast.

Paul writes this letter that we call Galatians because the freedom of God's people was being threatened. As closes his letter Paul addresses this issue with circumcision. Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant promise with Abraham and all of his descendants. This was a sign that these specific people belonged to God and possessed God's promises of a Savior. But with time many Jews—descendants of Abraham—twisted the truth. Instead of faith in God's promise, they put their trust in their actions and being able to follow God's Law.

That's what this group known as the Judaizers were doing and what Paul is talking about in verse 12. The Judaizers wanted to impress other people with their outward action—by means of the flesh, Paul says. But the truth is in v.12, "**The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.**" They were placing their confidence in their own capabilities and goodness—following God's Law—instead of in Christ. And to make it worse they were trying to compel these Galatian churches to do the same. The Judaizers wanted to have it both ways: saved by faith and saved by their works. They recognized a need for the Savior, but they weren't willing to believe how much they needed that Savior. Instead of

holding onto freedom in Christ, they wanted to impress others—including God—with what they could do and compel others with God’s Law.

And we can find ourselves doing that too. Like those Judaizers it’s so very tempting to focus on those outward actions and to base our confidence in what we have done. How often do we consciously or subconsciously look to impress others with the long hours that you put in, how busy you are and full your schedule is, how hard you work, all the sacrifices you make and how you put your life on hold. Or one might point out how they were on this committee with this position. Or, it’s pointed to how you are working here and helping out over there. Or, one might try impress with their church attendance that they are present certain amount of times or at least when you are able to when your schedule allows you to get away. One may then try and compel someone with saying something like, “I’m able to do this, the least you should do is _____,” and fill in the blank—that’s Law motivation, compelling with the Law.

How often do we stop to think, what impression are we giving with the words that come out of our mouths? Where is my boast? What is my pride in? It’s a subtle thought at first and maybe one we don’t always recognize but there are times when we aren’t just trying to impress other people, but in reality we are trying to impress God with what we do. At first glance it doesn’t seem like that big of a deal, but it can quickly grow: “Maybe I do deserve a little bit more from God, maybe now he will listen to me more because I do these things following his Law and will.” But by thinking you can earn more of God’s favor by our own actions, if that’s where your confidence is, then—whether we would admit it or not—one would be saying that Jesus didn’t do enough.

But if Jesus did not do enough, then we are lost. Those Judaizers thought that by doing this one time action that’s good enough—*look at we can do!* But then they neglected to see everything they didn’t do. Paul makes it clear in v. 13 that those Judaizers were giving the outward impression of keeping the Law when in fact it was the opposite, “**Not even those who are circumcised keep the law,**” he writes. The Bible is quite clear: James 2:10 tells us that **whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.** And earlier in this letter to the Galatians chapter 3:10 Paul states: “**All who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.’**” One cannot pick and choose which of God’s Law applies to them. One can’t choose to only focus on the parts of the Law that make them look and feel good about themselves. The Law shows so much more. It shows not only the things you have done well, but points out everywhere you have failed as well. It is a heavy burden of expectations that you cannot perfectly keep. And so it makes sense to want to be so very careful with losing that freedom and burdening oneself with the Law again. But that’s what we do when we put our confidence in our own goodness and what we have accomplished.

Instead, see what Jesus has done for you. Because of his perfect life in our place, we have been set free. When the time had fully come Jesus came to be born under the law to redeem us under the law, to buy us back and to set us free (Galatians 4:4). He took God's heavy Law off your back and placed it on his shoulders. He carried the heavy burden for us so that we are not weighed down with the expectations and demands of the Law; instead, we are free!

The Judaizers weren't only holding onto the Law to try and impress others. Paul says they were trying to avoid persecution for the cross of Christ. In other words, to fix their struggles and difficulties, to make life easier and more comfortable at the moment, they allowed false teaching to run rampant and took hold of it.

This wasn't only a problem in Paul's day; the church in every age fights against this temptation. False teaching doesn't happen overnight. It's not like an individual wakes up one morning and decides, "Today is the day that I'm going to be a heretic and go against God's Word." No, it's a slow process that left unchecked grows worse—the yeast spreads through the whole dough. Often times this false teaching stems from instead of holding to the truth of God's Word, instead of finding the answers to our questions to life's struggles and difficulties in God's Word, one is drawn towards the easy route, the things we want to hear, to trying to make life easier and more comfortable in this world.

What is it in your life that you are ignoring because to address the issue is going to make life more difficult? What are you holding onto because it's what is comfortable and what you know? What sins are you ignoring because you are afraid of how someone will react and treat you? Daily we need to think about what we do and be willing to ask ourselves, "Why?" How many of those things that we say we "have" to do, are things that we are actually obligated to do? How many of them do we do because we want to impress others, because it's the way things always have been done, are we doing because we want to make ourselves feel better, avoid being persecuted in some shape or form? Are we doing them because foolishly we think they are doing God a favor or then he will love me more? We don't need to just think about these things; no, we need to repent daily. Confess your sin, turn from yourself, and turn to God and boast!

Paul says in vv.14-15, "**May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything: what counts is the new creation.**" Our boast is not in our own goodness; it doesn't start with what I've done. It's in the cross of Jesus where we see God's justice and God's love reconciled.

We can never fully fathom how much God hates sin and when sin is committed. Sinners are God's enemy! He hates it when his Law is not followed perfectly. He hates it when someone ignores what it says and chooses to only focus on the accomplishments and good works. So what if you are able to do x, y, z if you failed at a through w . We see a glimpse of how much

God hates sin at the cross where Jesus died. He hates it so much that he punished his own Son for it. He hates sin so much he made his own Son suffer the very pains of hell on the cross for claiming all sin to be his own. Think of it as if a great big funnel is over Jesus head while he hangs on the cross and all of the sin of all time is pushed through onto Jesus so that he suffered once-and-for-all for all of it. Jesus who had no sin claimed all to sin be his own and became sin for us. On that cross justice was served!

And it's there on that cross where we see God's love. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son (John 3:16). He didn't hold back any punishment or any suffering, he didn't spare Jesus anything because he wanted to be sure the payment for sin was paid in full. And so, in spite of our sins and despite our sinfulness Jesus died for you—while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8)! And because Jesus lived for you and died for you, you are no longer bound by the chains of sin. Your sin died on the cross and was buried with Jesus in the tomb so that sin is no longer counted against you and no longer has power over you. You have been set free! You are no longer a slave to the Law and have to do these things to be saved. Jesus did it all for you so that you are free! You don't have to try and win God's favor, Jesus set you free giving you all of God's favor and love. And we know God accepted Jesus' punishment, suffering, and work because he raised Jesus from the dead three days later.

Do not let the Law burden you any longer; instead be at peace. Don't be weighed down by what you have to do, instead live freely desiring to live according to God's will out of thankfulness and praise to him. Be at peace because you have God's mercy that you are not treated as your sins deserve. Instead, you are a new creation that is not God's enemy but you belong as God's people, the Israel of God. This is our Lutheran heritage that we are saved—set free from sin and the Law—by grace alone—God's love that we cannot earn is given to you freely. You receive it by faith alone which God creates to make you his new creation. And this is yours by Scripture alone—only by God's Word do we know this to be true and have this peace that surpasses all human understanding. Being a Lutheran is more than what church you belong to, a claim to a name, or an outward action. Being a Lutheran is holding onto the truth of God's Word that you are saved not by your own works, but in Christ alone. Christians, boast! Boast, be confident not in yourself, but in Christ and Christ's cross. Amen.