

“OUR JUBILEE IN CHRIST”

REDEMPTION FOR THE PAST. HOPE FOR THE FUTURE.



Pastoral Letter August 2009

The main purpose of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians is to defend the Gospel ministry. Super-apostles had been undermining Paul's ministry in Corinth because they felt that Paul had a poor speaking ability and was not a very exciting pastor. With their worldly wisdom and influence, they also were confusing the new Christians in Corinth about their life-style as God's people as well as basic doctrines of the Christian faith such as the bodily resurrection from the dead. They were undermining Paul's ministry by promoting themselves.

Paul in second Corinthians does not personally defend himself against these attacks. Instead he sets forth the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the power of a true Gospel ministry. The Gospel ministry does not need gimmicks or worldly advertising techniques to accomplish God's purposes. After all, God uses the foolishness and weakness of the Gospel to confound the pride of power of men. (1 Cor 1:25) "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

In This Year of Jubilee We Do Not Preach Ourselves But Jesus Christ As Lord

Many of the preachers of Paul's day were full of themselves. They felt that it was the power of their oratory, the charismatic nature of their personality that made the church grow. They were like the preacher who counted the conversions he had brought about in the same way the Indians kept the scalps of those they had killed on their belts. Today more than ever, large churches are built on the sand of the personality of their particular preacher. These ministries often are a tooting of the preachers' own horns.

Paul had a different view of the Gospel ministry. The Gospel ministry is about the treasure of the Gospel proclamation of the forgiveness of sins. The Gospel is all about what God has done for us. This is carried out in a true Gospel ministry. In chapter four, Paul uses the picture of a treasure in a clay pot. The clay pot is simply a vessel in which the treasure is placed. Every pastor is a clay pot. The clay pot is nothing. The emphasis is on the treasure. So we have the treasure of the Gospel in these clay pots - human beings with all their weaknesses and imperfections. Our 50th anniversary highlights the clay pot that is the Church of the Lutheran Confession.

Paul simply states, “For we do not preach ourselves.” The Gospel ministry is not about us and our preaching or our intellect or our power. The spotlight is always to be on Jesus Christ as Lord. We preach nothing else except Christ crucified. This means that we do not promote ourselves and what we do, but Christ and what Christ did for us.

Paul now explains why the Gospel ministry is all about Jesus and not ourselves. God planned and carried out salvation through the miracle of the cross. Paul did not create this wondrous salvation. Furthermore, it is God who brings people to faith through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit opens our dead and darkened hearts so that we see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Paul knew this personally because on the way to Damascus, he was blinded by the bright light of Jesus’ presence. The Holy Spirit brought him to faith in Jesus Christ. It was God who preached Jesus in and through Paul.

To emphasize the power of the Gospel, God gave us this treasure of the Gospel in jars of clay. God chose the weak and the insignificant and nobodies of this world for a reason. Our human flesh loves to take credit for anything good that happens. This human pride is the very opposite of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which gives all glory to God. So God uses the apparent weakness and lowliness of churches and pastors and people to underscore the power of the Gospel. (2 Cor 3:4-6) “And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” So God uses fragile, ugly clay pots like us to proclaim Jesus Christ and the glory of the Gospel.

The church and God’s people are always under attack. From the world’s perspective, it always looks like Christians are losers. Paul describes our lot in life. (2 Cor 4:8-9) “We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; {9} persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.”

This gives us new hope in an age which is increasingly hostile to Jesus and the preaching of the Gospel. This year the CLC is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary. From a worldly perspective, we have not accomplished much. By human standards, we are not very important in the world’s scheme of things. And yet our weakness, highlights the grace of God. God has preserved His Gospel and its preaching among us. The Holy Spirit continues to keep people in the faith and bring people to faith in Jesus. God gives us life in the midst of a dying world. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is effective in our lives today. Our weakness and sinfulness leads us to say this year of jubilee, “To God alone be the glory forever.”

From a fellow clay pot,

John Schierenbeck