2015

Lent 2 • Romans 5:1–11 • March 1, 2015

Robert Kolb
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, kolbr@csld.edu

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of phrase,” and τροπὴ with the turning). The shadow an object casts changes as it turns in the light, but not God. Again, if there is a problem, it is with our perception of God, and not with God himself.

7. God’s work is good, perfect; that’s a good thing and worth relishing. But verse 18 puts its own stamp on this message with its opening word: βουλήθηκε. ESV uses a nominal phrase, “of his own will,” and that’s okay. But it obscures the activity that seems entailed in the participle. God gave birth (ἀπεκυψεν) to us, has done so, because he wanted to. Sin gives birth to death (ἀποκυνεῖ, v. 15); God gives birth to us by the word of truth (none else but Christ). In sin is death; in God (alone) is life. And he gives birth to us for a purpose (εἰς plus the infinitive is different from, say, ἵνα plus the subjunctive); the work is his, not ours; it’s not about something “we should be.”

Application

The Lent 1 (B) Gospel is Mark’s temptation narrative (1:12–13), the most sparse among the evangelists. Matthew and Luke say that Satan goes away, if only until “an opportune time” (Lk 4:13). Mark does not say that; Satan does not go away. Jesus’s whole ministry in “this world’s bleak wilderness” is a time of testing, trial, and temptation. And his disciples are not above their master. Testing, trial, and temptation are all around us too, and will go on until the end. They do not make us “happy” (one of the unfortunate renderings of μακαρίος), nor are they “blessings.” But “the man” of God endures them—and resists them—with patience, contentment, and even joy (Jas 1:3).

In this reading James gives us only one direction: not to be deceived. Everything else is description, the way things are: the bad way of the fallen world, the good and perfect way of the God who makes us new, in Christ, who is the word of truth.

William W. Carr

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Sometimes it seems as if our lives have wandered into one of the survival shows on television and we are about to be eliminated, or at least have questions about lasting longer than a few more weeks or months. Too many false calculations, too many wrong-headed decisions. Paul tells us in this lesson that this is the normal condition of those who have been claimed by the God who makes his strength perfect in his people’s weaknesses (2 Cor 12:9).

In Romans 5 Paul is moving from his presentation of the sinful state of all (1:18–3:20) and of God’s gift of righteousness, the new identity we have in Christ (3:21–4:25) into his discussion of life of the justified sinner, both from God’s perspective and from that of sinners in the midst of the struggle with sin (5:1–8:39). Today’s lesson addresses this situation in the present with the promise of a great future on the basis of what Christ has done in the past. He just gives us the facts. The present fact of the matter is that we are justified through Christ’s death and resurrection (Rom 4:25)
and we are at peace. We have every reason to trust the promise of God’s presence in the face of the chaos and uncertainties that afflict us.

1. The future fact of the matter is that glory awaits us, the completion of our being righteous, truly human, the kind of creatures in whom God takes delight, and the completion of our being at peace, the shalom—the peace and order of Eden restored, with everyone—God and his human creatures—and everything in their right places. As in the German “Gloria,” “all the fighting has ceased” (all’ Fehd’ hat nun ein Ende).

2. The past fact of the matter is that Christ died for us while we were in revolt against him. His was a real corpse, his was a real resurrection. He cashed in the wages of our sin; he has given us the free gift of life. His promise of future glory rests on his already having accomplished transfer of ownership of our sins to his tomb and transfer of his immortal life to our accounts (Rom 6:3–11).

3. We are no longer the persons we often think we are. As Abram and Sarai received new identity in today’s Old Testament lesson (Gn 17), so our baptismal certificates constitute new identity documents for us. Abraham and Sarah henceforth lived from God’s promise to make them more than citizens of Ur; they became father and mother of the people of God. We live out of our new identity as children of God, trusting his promise of his presence, his forgiving love, his provision, and his protection in our lives.

God identifies us with Jesus, whom Peter identified as the Son of the living God in the gospel lesson. Jesus promised the disciples the prospect of suffering and death because of their association with him (Mk 8:34–35, Jn 15:18–25), but he also promised everlasting life in his presence (Lk 23:43, Jn 14:2–4).

That is the reality of this world and its struggle against God’s people. But our sufferings give us reason for boasting, that is, broadcasting loud and clear just who we are (καυχώμεθα): we do not try to make ourselves great through seeking affliction or talking about it. However, in our excitement and joy we do want to tell everyone how we have been able to find true joy and satisfaction in the sufferings attracted to us by the fact that we belong to Jesus Christ. With the enthusiasm of little children we tell of our experience with the gifts of God. That can make other children so jealous they strike out at us.

But it is in suffering that we learn to endure, not on the basis of our own strength of will, but because we rest in the peace Christ gives: we know that the sufferings do not define our identity since Christ already has. Endurance builds character (δοκιμή), the definitive form that something takes on once it has been tested and proven). The character that the Holy Spirit develops in us is stamped with the image of Christ: the Holy Spirit has imprinted us with him as our identifying mark (Rom 8:29), and he enables us to live out this new identity according to this character (Col 3:20). That experience of enduring is possible only through faith, and at the same time it strengthens our ability to live by faith, in total trust in the God who remains with us even when he seems to have forgotten us.

Conclusion: Suffering does not save, but those who have found salvation and peace in Christ can expect the hostility of Satan in the midst of daily life as it manifests
itself in attacks and temptations of various kinds. The gospel comes to remind us day in
and day out that God’s word of forgiveness, life, and salvation has given us a new iden-
tity as children of God and the will and desire to live in the peace and joy that produces
service to the world and love for sisters and brothers in the company of the saints.

Robert Kolb

Lent 3 • 1 Corinthians 1:18–31 • March 8, 2015

The Word of the Cross

We are no strangers to scandal, and we know a scandal when we see it. Whether
it involves a politician, a Hollywood star, a sports figure, or even a church leader scan-
dals are, unfortunately, rather common occurrences. Scandals involve shameful, dis-
tasteful, offensive behavior. A scandal is an action or event regarded as morally or legally
wrong and causing general public outrage. That being the case, why would St. Paul
refer to the cross of Christ as scandalous or offensive? (Gal 5:11).

1 Corinthians 1:18–31 confronts the scandal of the Christian faith. The cross is a
scandal, a stumbling block. St. Paul makes that clear in our text. The church in Corinth
was located in a climate in the greater community that was characterized by some as
“vicious morality.” The city was known for depravity. The members of the congregation
were tempted to make themselves at home and comfortable in that climate while they
waited for Jesus to be revealed (1 Cor 1:7); a temptation, by the way, that is not lost on
many Christians today. The context for ministry now is not far from that of Paul’s world.

Unfortunately, while the Corinthians waited for Jesus to be revealed, internal
divisions occurred in the church. St. Paul’s response to these factions is centered in
Christ. The gospel he proclaims is the “word of the cross.” This “word of the cross”
announces salvation to the whole world through the suffering and death of Jesus. The
wise of the world who seem to possess every advantage cannot by their wisdom find
God. He comes “through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.” He
comes through the word of the cross. The Jews wanted spectacular signs from heaven so
the cross was scandalous to them. The Greeks wanted logical reasoning so the cross was
scandalous to them. God doesn’t come through terms established by human desire. He
comes on his own terms and that offends many. Paul states that what looks like undig-
nified foolishness to us is far above any human reasoning. This word of the cross is the
power of God! God chose what is foolish in the world. God chose what is weak in the
world. God chose what is low and despised in the world. He chose all of that so that
we do not boast in our own strength, but in his strength. God made Christ our wisdom
and our righteousness and our sanctification and our redemption. “We preach Christ
crucified . . . Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:23–24).

C. F. W. Walther writes this about the word of the cross, “Following Christ’s
death, the cross is now the only boat upon which even the greatest sinner can escape
from the raging floods of his sins into the harbor of eternal salvation. It is a ladder