2015

Lent 4 • Ephesians 2:1–10 • March 15, 2015

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ascending to heaven, upon which faith climbs confidently, as well as the key of heaven, with which the gates of paradise are opened. Once a sign of shame, the cross is now a sign of eternal honor and glory. Christians should never be ashamed of the cross. Instead, they should carry it secretly in their heart as their most precious treasure and they should carry it on their banner triumphantly throughout the world as a wonderful sign of the redemption of the world and as the dearest symbol of their holy religion, their faith, and their hope.”

Suggested Outline

The Word of the Cross

The preacher has the wonderful opportunity in this text to invite his hearers to respond to Christ by believing the word of the cross and living according to it.

1. Not power as the world sees it, but Christ the power of God.
2. Not wisdom as the world sees it, but Christ the wisdom of God.
3. Not me, but Christ in me.

Wayne Knolhoff

1 C. F. W. Walther, God Grant It (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 839.

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We are saved by God’s grace, through faith in Christ Jesus, for the purpose of living as God’s people to this world which he loves (Jn 3:16). This passage gives us a picture of “the two kinds of righteousness.”

The first portion of the text focuses on the grace of God: dead in sin, made alive in Christ, because of his great mercy. It is by grace that you are saved. This is the first kind of righteousness, the passive righteousness, received from God, the righteousness of Jesus given to us (2 Cor 5:21) in exchange for our sins. It is all God’s doing, God’s giving—God’s choosing of us that goes back even before creation and the beginning of time (Eph 1:4). This is the righteousness that defines our relationship before God, and because it is all God’s doing and his giving, we can rest assured in his word and promises, secure in our salvation and the promise of everlasting life, because it does not depend on us and our good works, but it depends entirely on Jesus and what he has done for us.

It is through faith in Jesus that we receive all his gifts and blessing, this new life from God, this first kind of righteousness. Faith has many facets as described in scripture: believing in Jesus, relationship of trust like a little child trusting his/her parents, believing is seeing (Heb 11:1), but the thrust of Ephesians 2 is that faith is a gift from God, not a good work that we do. It is also God’s action, the Holy Spirit’s work in us through the word. We have nothing to boast about in ourselves. We had nothing to do with our physical birth. Likewise we had nothing to do with our spiritual birth. We were born from above by water and the spirit (Jn 3).
Too often when we quote from Ephesians 2 we stop at verse 9, but the Apostle Paul goes on to instruct us about the second kind of righteousness, the active righteousness that is still God’s work in us, his work of art or workmanship. This active righteousness is the good works that he wants us to do, that he has prepared in advance for us to do. Good works are not necessary for our salvation. They do not define our relationship before God. But they are necessary in our lives for the good of our neighbor, and they describe our relationship before our neighbor. God is at work in this world, to love the world, through us, as we love one another.

What does that look like? Consider the law written on our hearts, summed up in the Ten Commandments. Luther’s explanation to each commandment, especially the second table of the law which describes our relationship to our neighbor, not only says what we are not to do, but also states what we are to do: how we are to treat our neighbor and look out for his/her interests.

What does this look like? Paul goes on in Ephesians 5 to encourage us to be imitators of God as dearly loved children, to live lives of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. We desire to be more and more like Jesus. Jesus lives his life in us and through us (Gal 2:20). Someone has said that we are to be Jesus’s love with skin on it.

Paul goes on in Ephesians 5 and 6 to describe how this work of art that God is doing in our lives, the good works that he has planned in advance for us to do, shows itself in our relationships: husband and wife, children and parents, employee and employer. It is reflected in our vocations as we relate to one another in our families, our work, our civic responsibilities, and our congregational life (see also Luther: Table of Duties).

Secure in our relationship with God (by grace through faith – first kind of righteousness) we are empowered by God to live as God’s people in this world, loving God, by loving our neighbor (Mt 22:37–40), using all that God has given us to serve him, as we find him in our neighbors (Mt 25:40) as the “Masks of God” (Luther).

Editor’s note: The following homiletical help is adapted from Concordia Journal, September 1979.

Lent 5 • Hebrews 5:1–10 • March 22, 2015

Sermon Notes

1. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews continues his discussion of the “high priesthood” of Christ (and his commentary on Psalm 110) in 4:14. The importance of the office of high priest was obvious to a Jewish audience (even if the office had been corrupted by contemporary human machinations), and the assertion that the role of high priest had reached its completion in Christ was no doubt striking. In the Old Testament, the high priest wore the names of the twelve tribes on his breastplate as representative of the people as a whole (Ex 28:29), and on the Day of Atonement only he