

The Fourth Sunday After the Epiphany

February 6, 2011

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." (NIV)

Imagine this scenario today. The Super Bowl is played and after the game the NFL commissioner, Roger Goodell, gets up on stage and takes the microphone. He grabs the Vince Lombardi trophy and announces: *"I would like to call up the players and coaches of the Carolina Panthers to receive this prestigious championship award."* Say what? Don't you think there would be a lot of head scratching? Has the commissioner lost it completely? Weren't the Carolina Panthers the worst team, the weakest team, the team that finished at the very bottom of the league? Aren't they the team that won only two games all year? How could he refer to this sorry group as champions?

My guess would be that in this scenario there would not be a whole lot of chest thumping or finger raising. There would be no grounds for boasting, at least any type of boasting in themselves and what they had done. There might even be some heads lowered and a sense of unworthiness as this last place team approaches the trophy celebration. There may even be a good amount of humility as these people get something great awarded to them when they did not deserve it.

Dear friends, Paul wants the Corinthians, he wants us, to realize that we are the Carolina Panthers in a spiritual sense. The fact is that we are even worse because we come up completely empty before God. So may we take to heart God's Word today as it teaches us: **We only have one reason for boasting.**

Do you remember the context here in chapter one and what topic Paul had been addressing? There had been factions and divisions among God's people in this church at Corinth. It was really pretty silly when you think about it. Some said they followed their pastor Apollos; others said *"no Paul is our man;"* still others said *"we have it right because we just follow Christ."* Paul urges them to be perfectly united and wants there to be no divisions among them. He reminds them it is the message of God's Word that brings them together and unites them - the message that centers on the cross - on Christ-crucified and risen.

Now Paul writes: ***"Brothers, think of what you were when you were called."*** Calling them brothers Paul is reminding them of how they are a family. They are members of a church family and more importantly through faith in Christ they are members of God's family. Paul tells them to think of what they were when God called them into that family. Why were they called? Was it because of their social standing?

Was it because they were the wisest or strongest? Was it because of their high positions or wealth or influence? A quick evaluation of their congregation would tell them this is not the reason they were called. ***“Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.”*** Sure this church had a few influential people like Erastus, the director of public works, but most were not the richest or most powerful people at all. In fact, most of the wealthy and powerful people in Corinth looked down on and shunned the Christians.

When they look at why they were called and chosen by God, Paul wants them to see it was not because of who they were or what they have done. In the contrary Paul wants them to see how what they have done and who they were made them even more undeserving of being in God’s family. Paul would write about it in plain words later on saying: ***“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were”*** (6). They had not one thing to offer to God that would make them worthy of being called His children. They had only sin. They deserved nothing. They had no reason to boast, even a little. Paul makes it vividly clear God chose them by grace. ***“He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.”***

Are we any different? What reason do we have to boast before God? Do we feel like we’ve done more than our share? Do you think you’ve tried pretty hard? Maybe you look at others and compared to them you are a decent husband, loving mother, or loyal friend. But then Paul would ask you, dear brothers and sisters, to think of what you were when you were called. Why did God bring you into His family? Was it your status, wealth, or influence? Was it because you were the strongest or best? A honest look and we would say: ***“absolutely not!”*** As our church council is installed to serve another year may each man be reminded that there is no reason for boasting. As I stand here again in this pulpit proclaiming the very Word of God there is for me another reminder that I have no reason to boast! What makes us worthy of such a calling? The answer is once again very clear. We did nothing to deserve it. We didn’t have a thing to offer God. We all come before God as spiritual beggars. Sinful to the core, by nature objects of wrath, we deserve only God’s punishment. In and of ourselves there is not a single reason for boasting. In fact, ***“no one may boast before him.”***

Yet, my prayer today is that there be boasting among us. We have one reason to boast. We have something to take great pride in and hold before all people. Boast about how God made you His own in baptism. I did nothing at all on that day when the Holy Spirit came to me through water and His Word. But I can boast that on that day the heavenly Father made me His child. Boast about how when God looks at you He no longer sees what you were, but all He sees now is perfection because of what you are in Christ. As Paul would also write to the Corinthian Christians: ***“But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”*** (6)

Boast about having a Savior who became the lowest of low for you. Boast about how He became our servant to live and suffer and die on a cross to buy us back from sin

and death. May we boast daily that all our sins are paid for and how the empty tomb of Jesus is our guarantee. Boast about the wisdom of God that He would give up His own Son to save sinners like you and me. Boast that we have a God that will never leave us, a Father who works all things out for our good, and a Savior who will return and take us to eternal glory. Boast how all that we have is a gift from God's hand, and how all that we do is with the strength and abilities God gives, and how all that is done is done to God's glory. Boast about the grace, mercy, and love of our Lord. For as Paul writes: ***"It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption."***

And it is something amazing to see how God works, isn't it? We don't have to be wealthy or powerful or even successful in the eyes of this world to make such boasts. For God used simple farmers and shepherds to make these boasts. God used fishermen and a tax collector to make these boasts. He used former deniers and doubters and even persecutors to make these boasts. He uses the lowly things and the despised things and the things that are not - in other words God even uses us. So boast in the only reason we have for boasting - not in ourselves but in the Lord. ***"Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."***

God has done something far more gracious than hand the great Vince Lombardi trophy to the worst and last place team like the Carolina Panthers. He pours out His grace on spiritual beggars who come before Him with nothing. He freely gives to sinners, to us, the gift of life and forgiveness and salvation through His Son. He showers His love upon the weakest and lowest and least deserving and gives to us the highest honor - that we should be called the children of God and that is what we are! Let us live as His children. Let us love and serve as He so graciously has given us the privilege. And let us find no reason for boasting in ourselves because there is none, but may we find plenty of reason to boast in the Lord. As Jeremiah wrote: ***"This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD. (9). Amen.***