

"Saved by God Without Any Merit" - I Corinthians 1:26-31

This morning with God's help we will meditate in the words of Paul from 1 Corinthians 1:26-31.

"Grace and peace to you from God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who has brought us together".

Amen

+++++

At Faith on Sunday February 26 we will have a congregational meeting. At this meeting we are going to review the events of 2016, go over statistics, hear reports, and the like. As any other congregation we meet four times a year and make plan for the church. Each year in the first congregational meeting we hear the reports, and discuss what was done, or not done or felt short of the expectations.

We can talk about these things in regard to our congregation but we live these kinds of things in regard to our life. I do not know about you, but I am not sure that much in my life is as I was expected. I am not suggesting that it is not good - I mean to say it is different than I once expected. Life has become something other than what I was planning on. It is a whole lot more difficult and demanding. And, maybe this is where you live too. It seems that most people find life is something other than what they planned for - whether they like the difference or not. I consider the lives of the generations before me and I realize than almost everyone is nothing special. A generation or two after they are gone, no one here remembers them, except, perhaps, their families, and not always that.

Our text seems to make a point of the fact that most of us are nothing special by the standards of this world. God's people are special for only one thing, really - they are special because they are God's people. And, really, in the final analysis, that is the only thing that matters. I do not want you to get all depressed, or anything like that. There is simply no easy way to address the fact that the life of a child of God is a normal life, just like everyone else in this world, except that we are chosen by God. Our flesh tells us we are something special. And we are, to ourselves. There is no one else in here, in my skin, except me. I feel me like I feel no other person. I am aware of my thoughts and desires like no other person's thoughts and desires. My flesh tells me I am unique and special. The world around me tells me that it is not so. And the Word of God tells me that the world is right. I am nothing special - except that God has laid hold of me with His grace, and claimed me as His child, and connected me to Christ.

St. Paul said it this way, **God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not.** Friends, God chose us, and we are the foolish, the weak, the base things, the despised, and the things that are not. We are not the worst of the lot - but our own experience tells us that we are not the best, or the brightest, or the most successful, or the best-loved, or the most admired. We want to be, but we just have not made it. And hearing the truth can be a painful thing. But, the good news is so clearly laid out in those simple words: **God has chosen us.**

This passage simply tells the world how little worldly celebrity and public opinion means to God. God chose us, and we are nothing special, except for His gracious choosing of us. How do we say it? that we are, **"Without any merit or worthiness."** And yet, God has chosen us, nobodies, to shame the world, to show those worldly experts that they really know nothing, to illustrate for the powerful how their power is really meaningless, and to show everyone who thinks that they are something in and of themselves that they are nothing. God has chosen us, instead.

The non-believers, those who reject Christ and His cross, rage at us and carry on, because we have been chosen. Now God came for them too, and He wants them to be saved too but they reject Him. They ridicule us and our faith. They make fun of us as backward and out of touch and superstitious and narrow-minded. Why do they waste their time? Why do not they just get on with their fabulous lives, if they think they are so much better?

Because God has ignored all of their wonderfulness and chosen us in Jesus Christ. We have peace that they cannot

even understand, let alone find. We have a confidence in God's promises that we have forgiveness and eternal life in Christ Jesus. We have a confidence that no matter what should happen in this life, whether we be famous or unnoticed, whether we be this or that, whether life be a pleasure or cruel, God has chosen us, we are His, He is ours, and we go to heaven. That is our hope. There is no true hope apart from that hope. With peace and conviction, we hold on to that promise looking forward with confidence to the life that awaits us on the other side of grave. We can even look forward to our annual meeting knowing that it is not reports, or budgets, or moved, seconded, and carried motions, or programs, or the election of officers that this church is all about, but it is Christ and Him crucified to purchase and win, lost and condemned sinners like you and me that keeps our congregation alive and going.

We do not face the future with confidence in mankind, or our political leaders, or the wisdom of our economic gurus. Actually, what we know about the wisdom of our leaders is part of what makes the future rather depressing for the track record has not exactly been good. The leaders when are in the election campaign promise many things, and then when there are in power do not fulfil them. We have no confidence that our country or any other country is going to be governed better, with better laws and regulations, with greater care and compassion, and fairness, and that it be safer, no matter who is in power.

We do not have any confidence that people are going to like one another better or treat one another better in the future either, no matter how much more politically correct things should become. People are still going to hate, and be greedy, and filled with anger, and distrust, and all the rest, just as they always have been since the day that sin entered the world.

So, be clear on this, without getting all depressed, but know that we do not approach the future with any joy or confidence about any of those worldly kinds of things, because that is not where the action is, this life is not the main event for the Christian. We face the future with hope and excitement and good cheer because God has chosen us. He has made us Christians, with a focus on a real and glorious future.

It is by God's doing alone that you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption. By God's choice, and through His work, in and through Word and Sacrament, you are a Christian, that is to say, you know Jesus Christ and trust in Him. By God's doing and choice, not your own, you have come to know how He saved you from sin and death. Most of us had little to say about it. Carried to the Baptismal font at a tender age, and there, and then, claimed by God, marked by God, adopted by God to be His child and heir of eternal life.

When I was 25 years old God took me out from Nicaragua where there was a war. My wife and I left that country looking for a peaceful place to live. I left Nicaragua not because I wanted to be a pastor. I lived in Miami for a while and then I moved to Canada. In Ottawa I attended a Lutheran Congregation and heard God's Word. And, for me, years later after a rather long and winding road, He compelled me to become a pastor, and then your pastor. I had little to say about it, right from the start. The best things anyone can say about me, and that I can find to say about myself are, that God chose, and God worked, and because of that, I am in Christ Jesus by His doing. It would be that way with you too.

Friends, we are nothing special except that Jesus is our righteousness - and our sanctification. We still want to sin, but Jesus works in us. We are nothing by ourselves, and when we tend to think that we are something in and of ourselves, bad things happen. We stumble into great sins. We get so proud we think we know more than God and begin to spout foolishness and all kinds of false doctrine. We begin to do things that harm the body of Christ, we want to change it, dividing it up, thinking that we know better, which really ends up that we leave the Church, and Christ, and forgiveness, and salvation.

Only when we know that we are nothing special, except that God has saved us, do we have hope. Only when we realize that it is by God's doing and not our own in the slightest do we finally walk in Christ and boast not of who or what we are, but in God alone. We are nothing special, except that we are saved - chosen by God to shame human pride and arrogance, and to hold forth the glory of the grace of God in Christ Jesus, so that, when the final day comes, no man will be able to boast of anything but of our God and of His goodness to us.

The things that seem so real and so important and so impressive are swept away but what no one can see, we have received - God's love and grace. And we, who are nothing special, are now the children of God in Christ Jesus. And it is in that confidence, and that humility, and that hope in God alone that we go to our annual meeting; hearing of what was and giving thanks to God for all of His past grace and mercy, and pressing on into the future trusting in all of God's grace and mercy. And no matter what happens, we are chosen by God. For He loved us so much that He sent His Son our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to save us. We hold on to that forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life. For we are precious in His eyes, through Christ our Saviour. Amen.

“The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keeps your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour”. Amen