



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

June 13, 2010

3rd Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon Text: [Philippians 1:18b-26](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [1 Kings 17:17-24](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 30](#)

Second Lesson: [Philippians 1:18b-26](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 7:11-17](#)

Exalt Christ in Your Life

Because of your deliverance

Because of your true deliverance

If you've ever been in my office, it might surprise you to hear that I really enjoy watching organizing shows, "Clean House" and those kinds of things where they clean out the people's junk. Maybe I just like watching it because then I can convince myself someone's work space is worse than my own. But I really enjoy them and I like watching them. One of the things I've found interesting at times is to get you to pare down some of the stuff you've got there and to point out that it's all just junk that can disappear, they'll ask you if you had to evacuate your house because of a mud slide or forest fires or something like that, what would you take with you? Everything else just really isn't that important to you then, right?

I suppose in a sense if the apostle Paul was on that show and they asked Paul that question he'd say, "I'd take nothing with me. I wouldn't need to go back into my house," or in his case his tent I suppose, "and get something out." He lays out for us in what I just read to you what is absolutely the most important thing in the world to him. That's to exalt or praise or lift up Christ in his body. He goes as far as to say "I'm happy and I'm going to keep on rejoicing because I get to exalt or praise Christ in my body if I'm alive. Or if I'm dead, I still get to exalt Christ and praise Christ in my body, so it doesn't matter to me what you might take away from me."

As we gather together and consider these words that the Holy Spirit had Paul write to the Philippians, we really see something about exalting Christ in our life. We see the reasons we have, the same ones that Paul had. We can exalt him for any deliverance he gives us in this lifetime, as Paul was confident God was about to give to him. We can exalt him at all times in life or in death because we know he's already given us the ultimate deliverance.

The apostle Paul is an interesting guy. When he writes this letter to the Philippians, the theme of the letter is "Rejoice in the Lord. I'll say it again, rejoice." The word "rejoice" is in there a whole bunch. In fact, you heard it in here, "Because of this, I'll rejoice and I'll continue to rejoice." It's an ongoing theme. That might sound normal except that you remember he wrote this letter while he was in prison. He was in prison simply because he had been preaching about Jesus. He hadn't necessarily done anything wrong. He did what God had told him to do and it got him thrown in jail. You wouldn't expect a guy to spend a lot of time writing about rejoicing. You'd expect him, from experience maybe

in your own self and the people around you, to whine and complain, right? “This ain’t fair. Life ain’t fair. God, why are you doing this to me? This ain’t fair.” You’d expect someone to be serving him some cheese to go along with all the whining he would be doing because that’s probably what you and I would be doing. But he doesn’t. He says, “I’m going to keep on rejoicing.”

Even at the start of what I read to you it talks about the important thing being that Christ is preached. He was just talking previously about guys that were preaching Christ out of jealousy and envy, trying to one up Paul by preaching about Jesus because they wanted to be considered better than Paul. Instead of letting them have it he says, “I understand what they are doing and that what they are doing is wrong, but you know what? I’m still happy because Christ is being proclaimed and that’s what I want to see happen. I want people to see their sin. I want people to see their Savior. The only way they are going to see their Savior is if people talk about Jesus. So I’m going to rejoice that they’re doing it even if they’re doing it out of wrong motives.” To Paul, the most important thing was that Jesus be exalted or praised or lifted up. If their preaching from false motive did it, so be it. Christ is what is important, not Paul.

That’s amazing, isn’t it? It’s absolutely amazing. If someone is attacking us and trying to make us look worse so they can look better, do you think we’d say, “That’s okay. As long as they keep talking about Jesus.” Or would we just be back on the attack against them? You know what we are like.

We know this phrase of Paul in this text. You’ve heard it a hundred times, a thousand times. “For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” We would say “Amen, I agree with you Lord. For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” Really? For me, to live is Christ...I don’t know about you, but for me, to live is often me.

How about you? When someone says something that attacks you and you talk about them to someone else and gossip about them, is that for Christ? Really? Or is that for you? That last drink you had that was probably one too many...was that for Christ or was that for you?

For me, to live is Christ...we can say it, but do we really do it? The obvious answer is, not as much as we want to. As much as I want to live for Christ, I don’t do it as much as I want to. As much as I know that he is worthy of me living for him...that’s what amazes me at what Paul was saying because I can see myself just complaining and whining through the whole thing. I’m sure my wife can hear it too. That’s just the way we are as sinners, isn’t it?

And by all rights God should just flick us off his shirt like we’d flick off a piece of lint. He doesn’t have anything that demands that he forgive us or that he continue to love us when we turn our back on him like we so often do. But he does it, not because of anything in us. He does it because of who he is and what he is like. That’s why he left heaven and lived perfectly where we live for ourselves. He continually lived according to God’s will. Then he took all the times that for us to live is ourselves and carried them

to the cross of Calvary and for all those sins, he endured the very agony of hell to take away our sins. This is what is amazing.

This is why we want to exalt Christ in our lives, to be able to fully and firmly say, "For me, to live is Christ because I want to live to thank him for what he has done for me. I want to put his will ahead of my own because my own will is not perfect. My own will is corrupted by my sinful nature." The more I focus on this great truth that we got to see today, what God did for me in my Baptism...then we get to see what he does as we receive his very body and blood in, with and under the bread and the wine and the love that he shows us in saying these simple things that to the eye look like nothing, water, wafer and wine, he says, "I'm going to work in them in such a way as to forgive your sins. This is the depth of my love to you. I want it to come to you in word for your ears. I want it to come to you with taste. I want it to come to you with smell and with touch so that your senses are immersed in the knowledge that I love you and I have forgiven you." That's why we exalt Christ in our body. The more we stay connected to the Word and the Sacraments, the more we can grow to the point where we are like what Paul was saying here, which I truly believe that he meant, "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

You and I can have a head knowledge of that. Yes, it will be better for us in heaven, but we spend an awful lot of time just clinging to the here and now and not living as though heaven is our ultimate home and we're just kind of on a journey until we get there. I believe Paul really lived that way...heaven was his home and he was just an alien and a stranger here as the Holy Spirit had him write. He says, "I don't know how my imprisonment is really going to turn out, but I'm becoming convinced that it's going to be for my release, which is a reason I can praise God. But even if this imprisonment would lead to death, I get to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far. I get to be reunited with all the saints." That will be pretty cool, but it won't be anywhere near as glorious as being in the presence of God himself, in perfection, without all of the imperfection around us that affects us now and makes our lives such a challenge and so difficult at times, including the imperfection that lives in myself, in my sinful nature. That will all be gone. We'll get to exalt Christ. We'll get to continue to praise Christ for all eternity. That to us then will be grand and great and glorious.

We think about that now and I remember as a kid thinking about praising God forever and thinking to myself, "Does that mean it's just going to be a never-ending church service? That doesn't sound so great." I can't tell you exactly what it's going to be like because I've never been there. But I can tell you, whatever it is, we're going to love it absolutely because our love will be perfect, our hope will be fulfilled and it will be grand and glorious however the Lord chooses to bless us for all eternity.

For Paul, the important point was that even if he died, he gets to keep praising God. That's the central focus. For you and me, we often want to get focused on ourselves and how others are, or are not, viewing us and how we are viewing others and the difficulty with this or the difficulty with that. God is urging us to lift our eyes a little higher, to keep our focus on Christ and live to exalt him with every breath and every

thought and every word and every action. Then, as the end draws closer or whenever it might come, it doesn't mean we'll look forward to it. We'll leave our loved ones here and cause them pain and that's hard, I understand that. But we will be comforted with the fact that we will be with the Lord forever. We will be what we talk about every year...the saints victorious. That comes to you and to me as we spend more and more time with the Word and with the Sacraments. Then we'll want to exalt Christ in our lives.