

Epiphany 5
February 8, 2015

"We Are Determined to Proclaim the Gospel"

1 CORINTHIANS 9:16-23

Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! ¹⁷ If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. ¹⁸ What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it. ¹⁹ Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

This past week we heard the story of a man in Michigan who walks twenty one miles to work each day. He has been doing this every since his car broke down ten years. He works at a job that pays \$10.55 per hour. We admire this man's determination to stick with his job even if it means walking twenty one miles per day.

As much as we admire this man's determination, we admire even more the determination of the great missionary the Apostle Paul. He was willing to do whatever was necessary to preach the good news about Jesus to people who will spend eternity in hell without their Savior. We just heard these words, "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some."

More determination, that's what I want in my life and I know you want it your life as well. We want to become even more determined to bring the gospel to people as Paul was. We want this for ourselves and we want this for our congregation.

We are compelled to do this

The Apostle Paul tells us he was compelled by the gospel to proclaim the message of the gospel to as many people as possible. "Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel." So we ask Paul, "Paul, what makes you tick?" "What floats your boat?" "What is the driving force in your life?" Without even thinking he says emphatically, "The Gospel! The Gospel! The Gospel!" The message of the Gospel is the driving force in our lives because it is so radically different from any other religion in the world.

Paul was determined to proclaim the gospel because the good news of Jesus Christ his Savior delivered him when he was lost. Paul knew how enslaved he once was to the belief

that keeping Old Testament laws and the extra rules and regulations of Jewish religion could save him from his sin and give him a good place in heaven.

In chapter three of Philippians he says, "If anyone else thinks he has reason to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, in regard to the law a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. I wonder if Paul ever had a day in his life when he did not think about how blind he was and hopeless lost in a false religious system.

Then the gospel came into his life. Jesus met him on the road to Damascus. Paul asked, "Who are you Lord?" The voice that spoke to him came back and said, "I am Jesus." The man who hated the name of Jesus now loved it. His eyes were opened to see that he was not saved by his own deeds of righteousness which fell short of God's glory. Instead his eyes saw Jesus as the source of his righteousness and peace with God and forgiveness of sin.

Here is what he says also in chapter three of Philippians: "But whatever was to my profit I now considered loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness that comes from the law, that which is through faith in Christ." How could he not take what been given to him by God's grace and proclaim it to other people?

Paul did not choose to preach the gospel. It was Jesus who chose him for that purpose. "If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me." If Paul chose to preach the gospel, then he says he deserves to be rewarded for making that choice. But because he was chosen by Christ, he was simply carrying out what needed to be done.

In Acts 9 Jesus said to a man named Ananias, "This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the nation of Israel." I am holding in my hand a glove. Paul was like this glove. The hand of the Lord took hold of him, filled him and used him to spread the message of salvation. He says, "I cannot boast. I am compelled to preach."

Paul did have to be rewarded for preaching the gospel to the people in Corinth. "What then is my reward? Just this; that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it." He provided for himself and made his own living by making tents. He wanted to do this because of the super sensitive people who would have said, "Paul is just doing this to get money from us and make a living."

What an honor and privilege it is to serve people with gospel as Paul did. More than once I have been told that I have the easiest job in the world because I only work one hour a week on Sunday morning. The work of the pastoral ministry calls for long hours, but they are good hours. Just think. Your pastor gets paid to study for a sermon or prepare a Bible class, or visit people and bring them God's Word and spend hours in prayer. What a

blessing it is to do this work full time and be supported financially by the people that you serve.

We are determined to bring the gospel to people as Paul was because we know the time is short. Our reading from the book of Job told us how short life is. "Does not man have hard service on this earth? Are not his days like those of a hired man? Like a slave longing for the evening shadows?" Then Job goes on to say, "Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath; my eyes will never see happiness again." Life is short. For some like Job it is filled with difficulty.

A missionary once shared the gospel with people in Africa. One of the villagers who heard the message decided to take the message to people in the next village. The only problem was, he had elephantiasis, a disease where the legs swell up enormously with fluid. In spite of the pain and the difficulty of walking, he carried the message to the people to the next village, and then to the next village.

A Lebanese man named Quasim Hatoum was riding a bus in Damascus with his wife and three old son. He spotted a Saudi man boarding the bus and preparing to detonate the bombs that we attached to his body. Without even thinking he handed his son to his wife, rushed towards the terrorist and threw his body on him as the bomb exploded. Six people died and nineteen were wounded. His son and his wife survived. How many times will this mother tell the story to her son about his father who gave his life to save them? We are determined to tell the story over and over again of Jesus, God's Son who gave his life on the cross and rose again from the dead to save not just as but the whole world.

We care about people

As we preach the gospel to people we are keenly sensitive to people and where they are at in their lives. Paul says, "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone to win as many as possible." As eager as we are to proclaim the gospel, we do this as if we are serving people the way a slave might serve his master. We are bound by chains of love.

Paul was willing to become all things to all people for the sake of the gospel. If he was with Jews he become a Jew to the Jews. Paul could sit down with Jews and show respect and love for them by not eating a ham sandwich in their presence. He says, "To those under the law I became like one under the law." If he ate with Gentiles or those who did not have the law, he says, I became like one not having the law. He would order a ham sandwich, just to show that he was willing to do whatever necessary to feel comfortable with them. Remember that day Paul preached to the Greeks in Athens. He did not start out talking about Jesus immediately. He began by telling these people he could see they were very religious. He showed sensitivity and a concern for where they were spiritually and used that as an opportunity to speak about Jesus.

If he was working with people who are weak he says, "To the weak I became weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." When our missionaries preached the gospel to the people of Africa, they were deeply sensitive to how the Africans could best worship. They wanted to use the historic liturgy that beautifully

proclaims Christ, but the Africans were not used to singing the liturgy as we have it in our hymn book. So they came together and developed music for the liturgy with sounds familiar to the African people. Not too long ago we heard our synod president report on his trip to Africa and how impressed with the way they sang the words of the liturgy in their own African style.

People are willing to listen to you if you are willing to listen to them and show you care about them. This past week for my devotions I was reading from Luke 15. Jesus told the three stories about a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost son. In each of the stories the people desperately search for what is lost. In each case they were determined to find what was lost. Jesus loves to see us determined to see the lost and even become all things as Paul says to save some. He says, "I do all this for the same gospel that I may share in its blessings." It has been said that people will not care to listen to what you say until you first show them how much care.

Jesus was determined to go to the cross and give his life for the world. He now asks you and me to devote our lives to bringing the message of the gospel to those who do not understand it. The man in Detroit walked twenty one miles a day to get to work. May Jesus help us go the extra mile as Paul did to bring the gospel to people that come across our paths of life while we still have the time. Lord Jesus help us be more determined to bring more of the message of the gospel to more people more often. Amen.