

2nd Sunday in Lent

March 8, 2020

Philippians 3:17 - 4:1:

**“Calvary’s Climb Confronts Us With . . .
Our Mind-Set”**

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the world of religion, psychology, motivational speakers, and leadership seminars, there's a lot of talk about having the right mind-set for success. What exactly is a mind-set and where do you find it? Your mind-set is in the privacy of your own head. It is revealed in the ways in which you talk to yourself. Experts will tell you that your way of thinking, your set of assumptions, how you make decisions will determine much about the way in which you will live your life and how successful or unsuccessful it may be. But how does one measure success? Success is defined by a favorable or desired outcome.

It is fairly easy to see that one thing that is missing is a discussion about human nature and the difference between good and evil, truth and lie, right and wrong. For example, if success is measured by a desired outcome, and if your desired outcome is to be the CEO of a major corporation, and you have the mind-set to destroy the careers of others for your own rise to the top, is that really success? Even further, is success always a favorable and desired outcome? If you've been around long enough, there is a thing called success through failure. One Christian example of this is the cross of Jesus where a crucifixion and death becomes the forgiveness of sins and eternal life for others.

Last week in Bible class I was talking about American Christianity. Most of American Christianity is what we might call "Lifestyle Christianity." I said that people today want practical guidelines to create mind-sets that give a successful life. They don't want complicated discussions about truth and error. Catechisms have been replaced by do it yourself books and preaching that promises victory over every problem and a satisfying/successful life today. Mainstream Christianity has become more interested in actions and results now, rather than hard truths and heaven later. A decision for Jesus ends up making Jesus into a standard of conduct that guarantees a good life - a lawgiver who provides timeless truths around which people are urged to live their lives to reach success.

There is always a grain of truth in false teaching. Unbelief always has just enough truth to make the lie easier to swallow. And it can be extremely hard to sift through it all to separate the lies from the truth. Still, we strive to get to the truth, and that brings us to our epistle lesson and our theme for this Second Sunday in Lent: **Calvary's Climb Confronts Us With . . . Our Mind-Set.**

As he nears the conclusion of his epistle to the Philippians, the apostle Paul invites his readers and hearers to imitate him: "Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us (Phil. 3:17)." A lot of false teachers out there offer themselves up as examples of success, conveying the idea that if you buy their books and do what they tell you to do then you can have a similar thing. They come off as incredibly arrogant. Paul would have us imitate him as well as others who are in the one gospel ministry. The difference between what he is offering by way of example and what false teachers offer is as different as night and day. These are not the ravings of an arrogant false teacher by any stretch of the imagination. He is inviting all of us to put on Christ.

While the so-called successful leaders and preachers of today tout a success that is of this unbelieving world and transitory, Paul is offering a success that is not of this world and eternal. In fact,

if you look at the same chapter in which we find most of our epistle lesson you will find that at one time Paul was a lifestyle Christian called a Pharisee. That was his “brand” we might say. It all was about a lifestyle that was designed to earn favor from God and people in this life and in the life to come. He was considered to be of the best of Hebrews, and no doubt he received great honor and many amenities among the people because of his lifestyle. Listen to his evaluation of Lifestyle Christianity after he came to the cross of Christ. He writes:

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith - that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3:7-11).

As you can see, success is quite different for Paul than how most view it. While the successful leaders and preachers of his time and our day may tout their accomplishments, Paul counts his as loss, even as dung. Anything that gives confidence in the flesh he totally sets aside, clinging only to the righteousness of Jesus Christ. It is only the righteousness of his Savior that can be called success.

The climb to Calvary confronts us with a mind-set that is totally the opposite of Lifestyle Christianity. It is sad that anyone might trade the cross and the death of self for a happy down here and self-glory. Paul begs for a denial of the self, a death of the self, where all self confidence is pushed back so that one might gain Christ by faith. Such faith knows the power of his resurrection and therefore desires to share in Jesus’ sufferings and death. Paul laments Lifestyle Christianity and warns all who would pursue their ambitions that lead to self-glory and a rejection of the cross. He says, “For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.”

Again, **Calvary’s Climb Confronts Us With . . . Our Mind-Set** - the mind-set of the cross that looks forward to the resurrection and the glory of God and does not seek its own glory. It is the mind-set that considers that the sufferings of the down here that flow from the cross are not worth comparing with what is ours forever. And this mind-set has been given to us in the waters of Holy Baptism. Christ has given us himself - his death and resurrection - the washing and renewal that takes us directly to his cross.

It was at the cross that he strove not for a glory or kingdom of this world. Rather, his mind-set was to reveal God by giving up everything for us, even his life, so that we might have everything. Paul powerfully proclaims this reality in the second chapter of Philippians where he writes: [Christ] “emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Calvary's mind-set then is the gift of who Jesus is and all that he has done so that it changes who we are and what we've done. It truly is an identity. And we see this identity sealed upon us in Holy Baptism. It is our washing away of our sins and the renewal of who we are that changes the way in which we see things and live down here. In him we look ahead. We look for his return and our own resurrection. That's what Paul means to say when he writes: "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved." That's the goal.

So we press on. We have a new mind-set that looks way beyond what are considered to be the successes of this unbelieving world; it is far greater than confidence in our own flesh and accomplishments. The Calvary mind-set is much more than positive thinking or steps to a better you. It's an ongoing death and resurrection that glories in Christ and fully embraces daily repentance and faith in the forgiveness of sins. That's what Paul is inviting us to imitate, returning each day to death and resurrection in Baptism through confession and absolution. He is inviting us to walk where Christ has walked. It's also why you can stand firm in the Lord. He's done everything for you and your salvation. Your citizenship is in heaven, even now as you walk the way of the cross here on earth.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott