

March 6, 2022

Romans 10:8b-13

On the Way to Calvary ...

“We Believe and so We Confess”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

When you stop and think about it, everyday of our lives we are *On The Road to Calvary*. Everyday we look back and consider the eye witness testimony that has been handed down to us in Scripture, and in that meditation we miraculously die and rise with Jesus our Savior. We are changed on the inside and something happens to us on the outside. These eye witnesses of Jesus heard. They saw with their eyes. Their hands touched the Word of Life and they believed, testified and proclaimed so that we may be connected to Jesus with them and have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. They believed and so they spoke - they confessed!

People often call eyes the windows to the soul. Eyes provide a lot of information about what's going on in the mind of another person. For example, when people are sad or worried or puzzled, they often furrow their brow, which makes their eyes look smaller. And when they are cheerful or happy they raise their eyebrows, making their eyes look bigger, so that they look like they have what we call "bright-eyes." You can also tell if a smile is real or fake by looking at a person's eyes. When a person is really happy they will crinkle the corners of their eyes when they smile.

Now, if the eye is the window to the soul, the pupil is - literally - an opening into the eye. The pupil acts like the opening on a camera, dilating or contracting to regulate the amount of light coming into the eye. We all know that our pupils get smaller in the light and bigger in the dark. This isn't just a mechanical response to the surrounding light. The pupils also adjust according to our emotions and expectations. They reveal what's going on inside of us.

Jesus says in Matthew 6:22-23, "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" What Jesus is saying in this section of the Sermon on the Mount is this: what is external points to what is spiritually internal. What he is saying can be paraphrased in this way, as Jeffrey A. Gibbs does in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew: "If your eye is healthy, that is because your whole body is full of light and is spiritually sound. But if your eye is diseased, that is because your whole body is full of darkness and is spiritually unsound."

What all of this means is that what happened at Calvary has an ongoing effect on all of us believers. What happens to us spiritually is externalized. The works that we do on the outside are works that flow from faith. They presuppose faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. The external life of the Christian is supposed to be the sacrifice of thanksgiving as we call on the saving name of Jesus. James writes, "Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works (James 2:17-18)."

Let me give you an example of this from Jesus. In Matthew 6:14 we read, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Here Christ connects the promise of the forgiveness of sins to the condition that we also forgive others their trespasses. Now, Jesus is not saying that we are saved

by our good work of forgiving. Rather, when we ourselves inwardly believe that we are forgiven for our sins, for the sake of Christ, this will come out externally by forgiving others. Forgiving others is an outward sign of having been forgiven. But, when we do not inwardly believe that we are forgiven for our sins, for the sake of Christ, we will not forgive others. Being unforgiving is an outward sign that we are not forgiven - that we have no faith.

In the same way, when we believe that what happened at Calvary is for us, we will speak of this great gift - we will confess it. As an eye reveals emotions and expectations within a person, so our external confession of Jesus, publicly at church and privately in everyday life, reveals that we are believers in him who have been bought from sin, death, and hell. Believing and confessing go hand in hand. **We Believe and so We Confess.**

Now, it is true that eyes can deceive and confessions can be hypocritical and faked. It is also true that only the Lord God can know what is really in the heart. However, this does not negate the words of Jesus, when he says in Luke 6:43-45,

For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

These words are foundational to the words of Paul in our epistle lesson for this morning. A good heart is only good by faith in the goodness of Jesus at Calvary and, consequently, produces goodness as if it were a good tree producing good fruit. On the other hand, an evil person produces evil, for out of the abundance of his evil heart his mouth speaks evil. There is no confession of Christ. With that in mind, the apostle Paul tells us that saving faith in Christ is very near to us. It is in our mouths and in our hearts. This faith believes in what happened at Calvary and knows that it is true because God raised Jesus from the dead. By grace through faith we are declared not guilty of sin, and this is in our mouths as we confess this forgiveness for ourselves and others. Jesus is on our lips and seen in our lives.

Paul quotes the prophet Joel, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." This is like Jesus when he says that if you forgive you are forgiven. Those who call on the name have salvation. The name of the Lord is Jesus and his righteousness. That name has been placed on us in our Baptism and has washed away all of our filth. When Christ returns in judgment and the world is destroyed with fire, those who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. The gospel works faith in our hearts so that we cry out to him. He delivers us hearing our cry, as it is the cry of faith in the righteousness of Jesus. As the eyes are the window to the heart so is our confession the window to our heart.

Paul is making the point that where faith in the heart exists, confession of the mouth will confess the faith - the mouth will speak and rejoice. The two go together. Confession without faith is a lie. Faith without confession does not exist. In our lesson for this morning Paul makes it clear: "everyone who calls

on the name of the Lord will be saved.” And that brings us to the First Sunday in Lent. This is the time of the year when self-examination is heightened. It is a time to ask questions. Where are we *On The Road to Calvary* at this moment in time? Does our outside truly reflect the faith that is on the inside? Are we trusting in the Lord Jesus?

While we always need to be careful that we do not leap to the conclusion that what we do is what saves us, we also need to be aware of the fact that what we are doing is to be a reflection of salvation. Here is the issue. Like the eye being the window into the heart, so is our confession on the outside what’s really on the inside of us. The fruit we produce is reflective of the tree we are. Faith without works is no faith at all. **We Believe and so We Confess.** And if we do not confess, or if we grumble at the thought of confession, then this is a Lenten call for repentance - and not just for this, but for all the good works that should be manifest in us because of the good works of Christ that we have received by faith.

And so we need to take this time in Lent to examine where we are internally and externally. It is certain that Paul does not approve of confession unless faith is present. He does not consider confession as a good work to purchase eternal life. Yet he demands confession because, as I have said, this is the sacrifice or worship of thanksgiving for all that Christ gives. Paul wants to be sure that we do not have a hypocritical or fake faith, but a true impulse of the heart which lays hold of the mercy promised because of Christ. Therefore, patience and every kind of good work shines in confession. Again, **We Believe and so We Confess.**

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott