

Mount Olive Lutheran Church  
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The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost  
July 8, 2007  
Galatians 6:1-10, 14-18

## *"A Humble Boast"*

by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

### Introduction

There are many things which could be the basis for the sermon this day. This is especially true when the pastor has just returned from a time of vacation. I spent some time out of town and also visited in several different churches in the past month. Some of those experiences could lead to interesting discussions. Besides that, the Scripture readings for this day lead in several directions. There is a good mission sermon in the words of the Gospel lesson for today. There is a stewardship sermon in a portion of the epistle. Both of those topics will be touched on this morning. In reality these readings are good examples of this Pentecost season of the church year—we see the work of the Lord in the life of the church as we grow and live as His children. That is a blessed truth.

But our theme for this day, suggests the direction we will be led. It is a theme that contains two words which when placed together form a striking contradiction—A Humble Boast. Yet they also speak most clearly of the work of the Lord in our lives. May His Spirit lead us this day as we consider the words of our text.

### Humility

The first thought from our theme, "A Humble Boast" is humility. There is a great deal of humility taught in the epistle for today. The words of this text are part of the concluding chapter of St. Paul's letter to the Galatians. The concluding verses of most of the apostles' epistles contain words regarding the Christian life—how we are to live in response to the great work God has done for us in saving us. That is certainly the case in the opening words of our text: "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself lest you too be tempted." The apostle here is reminding us that when we deal with others and their sins and failings to do so with humility. Remember who you are too in the sight of God without his grace. It is all too easy to take the approach—look how much better than so and so I am. Or look how much better we are than those people. The purpose of our witness to others should be to restore them. Now it is noteworthy that often today no one is trying to restore anyone. The "let each one do his own thing" attitude of our day has also infected the members of Christ's church. The boastful pride often exhibited by some is also evidence of this. In the Gospel lesson today, Jesus is especially strong in his judgment on those towns who would reject his word: "If the works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes." It is necessary to hear the full counsel of the Lord and to do it without boasting. So the apostle continues: "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself."

In the Gospel lesson for today, Jesus indirectly warns against a misguided boast as well. The Gospel lesson recounts the commissioning of the 72 by Jesus and his sending them out two by two. When they returned from their journey, they return overjoyed. "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name." The Lord responds that He has given them authority over all the power of the enemy and nothing can hurt them, but "Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in the heaven." Do not get too puffed up about who you are or what you can do. Rather rejoice in what God has done for you.

Permit me just one more instance of the necessity of humility. On a short trip last month, I visited Washington, D.C. the nation's capital. It is still a magnificent place to visit. The buildings and monuments there all speak to the power and glory of our nation. But Washington, D.C. in this post 9/11 world is also something else if you would personalize it. It is a city very, very afraid. It is a place of concrete barriers around every important building and intricately designed security barriers on the roadways leading to them. The power and the glory of earthly splendor and strength may mean very little when there are those willing to blow themselves up to prove a point. The events of the past week in Glasgow show just how desperate some are to obtain these ends. The glories of the age are fleeting indeed. How little strength we have. But as the Scripture says, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."

### Boasting

And that leads us to the second important word of our theme—"A Humble Boast" The apostle Paul again leads us: "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world." Here is the source of true boasting. We look to our Lord Jesus Christ who has been crucified for us. In his cross, we see the stark reminder of the payment for our sins and the victory which he has won over sin and death. It is not ours to boast of anything we have done, but our boast is in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is the Lord who works his salvation for us. In the Old Testament lesson for today, the prophet Isaiah speaks of this in terms of peace. "Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad with her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her ... behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream." In the Gospel lesson, the Lord exhorts the 72 to bring peace: "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'peace be to this house!' And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him." The blessing of peace upon those who receive the message of the Lord is a great gift indeed. In the epistle, the Apostle Paul also reminds us, "for neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God." The promise of peace is there for all who are the Lord's. Thank God for our salvation. As Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, not the peace that the world gives, give I unto you." That is his promise. It is his peace. "Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." A humble boast indeed.

### Concluding Thoughts

In our lives as those saved by Christ, we are reminded as well in these readings for today that we serve. We serve when we pray for the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into his harvest. That is the mission emphasis that I mentioned in these readings. The Lord sends, but we are the ones who pray for and respond to the Lord's work. We are sent as well, to those around us. We can share the peace of the Lord and the blessings of Christ crucified with them. That is part of our task as well. And most assuredly we pray that the Lord of the harvest would send forth laborers into his harvest.

And we support the work of the Lord. Jesus says "the laborer deserves his wages." St. Paul reminds us as well: "One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches. ... So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." We share our blessings for the sake of the kingdom. Many of you may have received, or soon will, a mailing from our congregation asking for your help during these summer months. We fall a little behind in our needs each week and each week the deficit grows larger. We are called upon by the Lord to support the work. Now it was most assuredly easier in the times of Jesus, or was it? They went out with very little, they depended upon the Lord and he provided. Remember, he will provide for us as well. We need only ask him to bless us. For the harvest is plentiful, the workers are few. May the Lord bless us, and may He bless your response.

Lot of thoughts today. Lots of things to note. But remember this once more: Boast not of yourselves, humbly stand before the Lord. But boast greatly in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ for he has won the victory for us.

In the cross of Christ I glory  
Towering o'er the wrecks of time.  
All the light of sacred story  
gathered round it's head sublime.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.