

Romans 5:1-11 - “Good Boasting”

Pr. Kurt A. VanFossan - Lent 2B 2024

Boasting is usually a bad thing. Some people boast about their children, their abilities, their achievements, or possessions. Why is all such boasting sinful? Because it usually fails to acknowledge that the good things we have are underserved gifts from God (James 1:17). They have not been given to us because we are good, faithful people, but because God is a good, gracious and loving God.

While it does speak throughout the Bible about being rewarded for righteous deeds, it's sinful to boast also about our righteous deeds since whatever righteous things we may do in the eyes of God are done as a result of our faith in Jesus Christ. For *“without faith it is impossible to please [God]”* (Hebrews 11:6). And since faith is *“a gift of God, not a result of [man's] works, so that no one can boast”* (Ephesians 2:8b-9), we certainly have nothing to boast about in and of ourselves.

The truth is that every good thing we have is an undeserved gift from God. If any of us got what we deserved, we would all be suffering eternally in hell, since by nature we are all sinners, and sin continues to stain even our good works (Isaiah 64:6). That's why it's sinful to boast about the good things we have or have done. Such boasting is a form of worshipping ourselves instead of God.

If you've been reading the Lenten devotions I put in your church mailbox, you may remember (from the devotion for Ash Wednesday) that one of the last things Martin Luther scribbled on a piece of paper before he died were the words “We are beggars, it is true.”

We are like the blind beggar, Bartimaeus, who kept crying out to Jesus, *“Have mercy on me!”* (Mark 10:46-48). That's why part of the ancient liturgy of the Church that we use includes the repeated words of the Kyrie, or Kyrie Eleison, which means *“Lord, have mercy.”* In response to our cries, the Lord reminds us that He has had mercy upon us through His death and resurrection, and through our baptism and faith in Him, making us heirs of the kingdom of heaven with Him.

Because of our God given faith in this Good News, instead of boasting in ourselves we boast in the Lord. In fact, even though the ESV translation of the Bible that we're using uses the word *“rejoice”* three times in our text from Romans, the Greek word used here is most often translated *“boast.”* The first time is in verse 2, when God through St. Paul says, *“Through [our Lord Jesus Christ] we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice/boast in the hope of the glory of God.”*

Boasting in our salvation through Jesus Christ is the opposite of boasting in ourselves. That's because of the word *“grace.”* The word *“grace,”* when used in connection with our salvation means that man has nothing to do with his salvation. As God tells us through St. Paul in Ephesians 2(:8-9), *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

God doesn't leave it up to man to decide to believe in or follow Jesus. Even our faith in God is a gift. Neither is our salvation dependent upon our good works once God has given us faith. Salvation by *“grace”* means that our salvation is fulfilled through what God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit did and continues to do for us. Our salvation is complete in Jesus' death and resurrection and the Holy Spirit's work of creating and sustaining our faith in Jesus through

God's Word and Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. Our good works are the fruits of our faith in God's mercy, not the cause of His mercy.

One of the best sermons Jesus ever preached on the good news that we are saved by God's grace was during His crucifixion when He said to the thief on a cross next to Him, *"Today you will be with me in paradise."*

Did that thief do anything to deserve eternal life in paradise? He admitted earlier that he was *"receiving the due reward of [his] deeds"* (Luke 23:32-43), a damning death on a cross. And he certainly didn't have a chance to do any good deeds after God gave him faith in Jesus as His Savior. Yet we know for certain that this repentant sinner who believed in Jesus as His Savior is in paradise. That's salvation by the grace of God.

No doubt, if that thief had lived longer on this earth, he would have been happy to let others know of the amazing way God worked in his life to save him. Including how God worked through his suffering. And that's the second time the word *"boast"* is used in our text. *"We rejoice/boast in our sufferings."*

If God would have let this thief know that if He had not allowed him to be caught in his crime and crucified next to Jesus he would not have come to saving faith in Jesus, do you think this thief would have thanked God for allowing him to suffer and die on a cross? I'm sure he would have.

I'm also sure that the Lord could show us something similar when it comes to the times when He has allowed suffering to come into our lives. And when our times of suffering are not specifically for our salvation, then they are being used by God to save others. That's the way it was with the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. It was for our salvation. Because of God's work through all things to save us (Romans 8:28), we can *"boast"* even in His work through our times of suffering.

The third time boasting in the work of God is mentioned in our text is in verse 11. *"More than that, we also rejoice/boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."* The good news that we are saved *"now"* emphasizes that our salvation is complete through our faith in Jesus Christ—that there is nothing more we or even God has to do to save us; this good news gives us peace even in the midst of our times of suffering.

Imagine the excitement that thief on the cross must have felt, even in the midst of his extreme suffering, as he trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ's promise that today he would be with Him in paradise! This is the good news that God *"poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit"* at the time of our baptism; and that He sustains in us by His promises, such as His promise in the Lord's Supper that His body and blood was given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. (Matthew 26:26-28).

"Boasting" that our salvation is complete through the work of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is itself the work of God which He works through us to not only create saving faith in others, but to strengthen our own saving faith. All glory be to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Children's Sermon] When God gives us something, like this packet of fruit snacks, does God want us to boast to others, "look what God has given me, and not you"? No. Instead, God wants us to thank Him for His undeserved gifts and be willing to share them with others.

What's the greatest gift God has given us? Jesus Christ and our faith in Him as our Savior, which is a gift that keeps on giving, especially when we share it with others.