

INI-SDG

In the Name of Jesus – To God Alone the Glory

3.1.2009 Lent 1 – St. Stephen Lutheran (West Bay) Mountain View, CA – Pastor N. Radichel

Good morning once again fellow reporters of God's good news in Christ Jesus our Lord. The Grace of our Father, the Mercy of His Son, and the Peace of the Holy Spirit be with each of us now and into eternity.

Last week, I quoted Martin Luther King Jr. who said how "Darkness is only driven out with light, not with more darkness." I'm not exactly sure what he meant by darkness and light, but like I said before, we understand as Christians that we fight a segregation that is not only skin deep but penetrates our very soul, as it surfaces in our thoughts, words, and actions. SIN shows itself in the separation of our Old Adam from the New Man believers have in Christ. It is necessary and critical to understand this hostile segregation and what fuels the fire on BOTH sides. For throughout the history of the time, it seems to me that there is a clear view of one dominating sin. Martin Luther, the Reformer, once said this particular sin is "the head, life, and very nature of all sin." Could that be?

- What was it that kept Pharaoh from letting the Children of Israel go?
- Can you guess why David thought he could get away with adultery and murder?
- Why did the rest of the world made fun of Noah for the decades he was building the ark?
- Why did the LORD write on the wall of Belshazzar's feast?
- What's the reason why King Nebuchadnezzar, one of the most powerful kings ever to walk the earth, got on all fours to graze the ground?
- Was there reason for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah?
- Can you fathom why the LORD caused the confusion of languages at the Great Tower of Babel?
- Why wouldn't Jonah go to Nineveh the first time he was told?
- For what reason did God cast Satan and his demonic followers out of heaven?
- How did Satan get Eve to question the Word of God?

The famous author C.S. Lewis once said, "It is PRIDE which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began." In our Bible studies this past year at St. Stephen I have realized how much that is true. In studying the shorter books of the prophets as well as the prophet Jeremiah, it is amazing to see the arrogance and pride of those who were publicly known to be God's people; not to mention those who were the powerful conquerors of God's people such as the unbelieving Babylonians who we're told in Habakkuk that *they ascribe this power to their god. (1:11)*

King Solomon was gifted with the greatest wisdom since the beginning of the world, and he would have agreed with Luther and Lewis that PRIDE is the chief cause of misery throughout this selfish world. Many of his Proverbs speak of pride and the flood of dangers it brings (no pun intended). We would be forgetting Christ's scripture if we thought that pride doesn't affect us in our work for Christ. *Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall... (1 Cor. 10:12)* Paul warned the Corinthians while reminding them of Israel's past self destructive history. If it happened to them... it can happen to us. That's why it is important to always remember what Solomon wrote in:

Proverbs 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling.

These are the words of God that warn us dear fellow redeemed in Christ. So what do they mean? Our theme reminds us: **You are Baptized into Christ! THEREFORE, Properly Define your Pride.** The picture of the high walls of Jericho in your bulletin is an example of **Pride going before destruction.** Like the other Biblical accounts mentioned earlier, it was pride in STRUCTURE or SELF that became the downfall. Likewise, the people of Jericho were arrogant enough to think that their massive wall structure surrounding their city was impossible to penetrate. Even more foolish than it may seem is the sin in the Garden of Eden that gave birth to this sinful world- based on a proud thought that the created one could be like the One who DID the creating! That would be like the dust that I sweep up my garage somehow thinking it was on an even level with me.

We humans by nature are PROUD dust and ashes aren't we? For as Solomon also said in the same chapter ***All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight. (16:2)*** Left to ourselves, we'll often do the same thing. We'll be as bad as or worse than the Pharisee in the temple who prayed, "Lord I thank you that I am not as other men are..." We rationalize our sin. We justify ourselves. We know we're not perfect, but we feel we're pretty good compared to the next guy. But God does not grade on a curve. God's standard of righteousness is PERFECTION.

I often consider what my own grade is like in comparison to what God EXPECTS from me. As a parent, would I be able to give myself a 100% grade? Am I a perfect dad a 100% of the time? Not even close. But then I thought, how about as a husband? Moving on... What about as a neighbor, or a citizen of this country? What about my work as a pastor? Do I meet God's expectation of 100% perfection in just these few things? The answer is of course no. There have been so many times already in my short ministry where God has humbled me in any pride I thought I had. But sure enough, my pride and human nature somehow inflates and wants to give me a higher score than I deserve in ALL these areas.

As disciples and followers of Christ our pride must be continually in check! **Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling.** The Apostle Peter learned this the hard way. He showed great pride in his faith in insisting again and again to Jesus, ***If I have to die with You, I will not deny You! (Mark 14:31)*** But less than hours later Peter would sinfully swear that he didn't even know the Man. If this happened to Peter, the same one whose confession of faith that Christ is the Son of God Jesus promised to build His church on, we would be arrogant, haughty, and a bit too proud to think it could not happen to us.

The 5th verse of Proverbs chapter 16 says what God really thinks about this kind of pride when He says, ***Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD.*** By the way, that word Abomination the LORD also uses with idolatry, homosexuality, and human sacrifice. You can see how PRIDE is really connected to each one of these also. Especially in our day we so often hear the popular phrase... "Gay pride." So what does the LORD think about that?

The prophet Habakkuk wrote about the same issues of pride against the Babylonians. He said, ***Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; ...But the just shall live by his faith.*** That's what we've been talking about through this whole series the last three weeks. That's why it is important to remember that **You are Baptized into Christ!** You work for HIM now... not yourself. The first epistle of John reminds those who are baptized into Christ's name THEREFORE, ***Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 Jn 2:15-17)***

Would you say that the Apostle Paul did the will of God? God taught him how to: **Properly define his pride.** Paul writes to the Corinthians a long list of all of things he COULD take pride in and boast about himself. He was a Hebrew, a Jew, a descendant of Abraham. As a minister of Christ he labored more than any other, was whipped, beaten, imprisoned, stoned, and so on and so on. Paul had reason to take pride in his life as a Christian and all that he suffered for Christ. But rather, he had been taught by the Lord how his pride and boasting should ALWAYS be properly defined.

If we are going to take pride in something, it ought to be boasting in the truth about our Savior Jesus Christ! Boast about the blood Jesus paid for your forgiveness of the cross! Boast about God's promise of resurrection and eternal life with Jesus in paradise. Boast about the love from the Father of Heaven who pours out blessings on ALL people's needs. Boast about the Word of God that the Holy Spirit uses to create the faith you have in you right now. Boast about how you witness by faith the miracle of the Communion of Christ's body and blood in and with the bread and wine when you receive forgiveness of sins in the Lord's Supper.

In our personal, congregational, or synodical gospel work for Christ...boast about the spiritual growth more than numerical growth.
Boast about the Grace of God!

The Apostle James writes... ***God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. (James 4:6)*** If we are going to boast about anything, if we are going to take pride in anything... let it be in the Words and Work of Christ! He is the author and finisher of our faith. What credit can we give to ourselves? For ***He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ...(Philippians 1:6)***

Pride can be a very dangerous, even a deadly thing! **Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling.** Pride can and will fuel the fire of sin. When our Lord helps us to properly define pride in Christ He fuels the fire to teach us to follow in His footsteps. Luther once said, "All of us should chiefly strive to learn to know Christ well that we may proudly claim for ourselves the triumph and the majesty we have in Christ."

You are baptized into Christ! Therefore... Properly define your pride, in Him! Amen.

This peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard and keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.