

"FINDING GLORY"

A Sermon By

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INTRODUCTION

Some of you may remember a television comedy series of a few years back called, Topper. One of the episodes in this delightful series helps to get us in to today's sermon.

Mrs. Topper wanted to "train" her husband to be nicer to her. One day she came across a book entitled, How To Train Puppies, and followed it exactly by substituting her husband's name for the puppy. And so any time her husband, Topper, would do something nice for her she would first praise him and then give him a treat. She would rub his neck (like the book said to do for a puppy) and how old Topper would respond!

Things were going along great...until one day Topper found this puppy training book and read his wife's notes in the margins of the pages. Disaster, of course, struck the Topper home. Topper didn't like the idea at all of being trained like a dog and so he immediately went back to his old ways. Yet, a major lesson was learned which was that there is power...there is great power...in encouragement. And whether it's with puppies or with people, you can make a very positive impact through a bit of encouragement.

DEVELOPMENT

Which leads me to lift up this question in your thinking: where do you find encouragement?

For St. Paul, encouragement was found at the foot of the cross. Listen to what he is saying in his letter to the Galatians, chapter six, verse fourteen:

"Far be it from me to glory....except in the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ."

Here is where Paul found the strength he needed to be what God was calling him to be...at the foot of the cross. There's a message in this for all of us so let me work with this text here today with you.

Where do you find your "encouragement", or to make it more "Pauline"...where do you find "glory?" Now I feel it's quite safe for me to say that we all "glory" in something...don't we? Some people "glory" in their accomplishments. Their shelves are filled with trophies that have to be polished, shined and how they invite our attention. For some, their walls are covered with plaques. Nothing wrong with that. Doctors like to hang their diplomas and certificates on their office walls and I confess I enjoy looking at them. Somehow it has a balancing effect for me emotionally when I get their bills in the mail. Personally, I'm not much for placques and diplomas, but I have a few clippings...one which says, "Clarke Leads GHS Sluggers With .471" average. That's one I really treasure.

Sir Christopher Wren lies buried in St. Paul's Cathedral in London, that great church that he both designed and built. On his tombstone is a simple Latin inscription:

"Lector....SI MONUMENTUM REQUIRIS, CIRCUMSPICE".

Some people are achievement oriented; they glory in things accomplished. We can identify with them. "If you wish to see his monument, look around you."

Others glory in their possessions. This is a little trickier. Materialism...the worship of things. This is a constant threat, a constant temptation in a society such as ours. Someone has cleverly observed that,

"AMERICA is the land of the SPREE and the home of the CRAVE".

Fights over money continue to be the "bottom line" in most marital disputes and discords according to most surveys. Other surveys show that most Americans would rather be rich than smart or better looking. Some people just "glory" in their possessions.

Doyle
And we all know of people who "glory" in their family trees and traditions. William Jenna is an antique dealer. He's often asked to appraise rare pieces of furniture in the homes of people. Sometimes those rare pieces turn out to be cheap copies. One particular woman whom he speaks of was trying to impress him with her knowledge of such valuables and proudly displayed a particularly tacky set of imitation French Provincial living room pieces which Jenna knew were made around the early nineteen forties in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This woman proceeded to tell him that,

"It is European, of course....why it's been in our family for many generations....and it is PRICELESS!" Jenna then asked her, "And what style is it?" Rather haughtily, she replied, "Why....why it's FRENCH PRETENTIOUS, OF COURSE!"

Let's face it...there's a lot of French Pretentious around, and who knows...maybe a bit of Dutch Pretentious, too. Some people glory in family tradition.

My point is that people "glory" in different things and few of us would ever think to glory, as Paul did, in the CROSS of Christ. I include myself in this with all of you. Why even in the ministry there are many temptations to "glory" in wordly things....egos that need massaging. A "national" reputation. A "delegate" to some conference. To serve the "cathedral" church. A big staff. A big car. Jamie Buckingham tells of a famous preacher in the south who use to wear red socks, sequined trousers and a flashy sport coat into the pulpit. Then he would begin his message by praying:

"O God....HIDE ME BEHIND THE CROSS...."

Somehow I find it difficult to think he really wanted to be hidden.

Paul glorified in the cross of Christ and so, too, can we. All we need to do is spend time thinking about and reflecting upon the meaning of that cross for our lives.

CHRIST UNDERSTANDS OUR SITUATION

First of all, we can "glory" in the fact that Christ understands our situation.

Oh, sometimes we have those low moments when we think that no one cares and that no one sees or understands our particular set of circumstances...no one has ever suffered the way we are suffering. But the cross is there to remind us that such thinking is incorrect and out of bounds for the Christian.

Sydney Seaward, a TV news anchor woman down in Houston recently performed a courageous act. Near the conclusion of a special report on breast cancer treat-

ment that aired several times, she removed her ash blond wig before the camera, revealing her own hair loss from chemotherapy. By doffing the wig she has worn during the telecasts of this all-news station since May, Sydney Seaward is hoping to raise public awareness about cancer and its treatment. She said,

"My goal is to de-mystify cancer and chemotherapy and to show that treatment is nothing to be afraid of.."

And by identifying herself with other cancer patients, Sydney Seaward was seeking to reach out a hand to them...to show them that "yes...someone understands". As some of you know, this makes a difference, but take it up a few steps higher.

When Christ bore the cross of Calvary, He was identifying with our situation. He walked where sometimes we have to walk. He hurt where we hurt. He endured the crises that we endure - rejection, suffering, betrayal. And we "glory" in that cross of Christ - because, He understands. Never forget that. That is our faith.

TAKES AWAY OUR SINS

But we also "glory" in that cross because He has taken our sins. And there are few people who don't have some sins that need to be dealt with....that need to be lifted from their lives. You may be one of them.

There's a man out in Astoria, Illinois by the name of Wayne Rouse who came across a news item recently about a new 900 phone number. It's called...and are you ready for this....it's called MR. APOLOGY. Wayne Rouse said this:

"Some clever capitalist has figured out how to make a buck because you and I feel guilty....."

Now, raise a hand if you want this number and I'll try to get it for you. Don't be shy, now. Mr. Apology is getting about a hundred phone calls a day. Apparently, what people are doing is leaving their anonymous apology on the answering machine without ever having to deal with the real damage they may have done to another human being. Just think...you can "dump" your garbage without any real accountability. It's a handy system and it's designer is going to make money on it.

Why? People there are a lot of people "out there" carrying around a lot of guilt. Unresolved guilt. People on hospital beds. Marriages under stress and in danger of coming apart because of unresolved guilt...little secrets gnawing away at one spouse or another. There are a lot of people walking around who don't know how to heal the past. Christopher Morley once said:

"If we suddenly discovered that we had only five minutes left to say all we wanted to say, every telephone booth would be occupied by people trying to call up other people to tell them that they loved them...."

Norman Vincent Peale once told of a young mother who had been unfaithful to her husband and found she could not rid herself of the guilt. She asked God to forgive her, but she could not forgive herself. She had the feeling that everyone knew of her terrible, dark secret and that everyone would be better off without her. Without saying a word to anyone, she packed a small suitcase and registered in an assumed name at the tallest hotel in the city where she lived.

"My room was on the 5th floor" she later said. "I had the feeling that it wouldn't be high enough....."

She walked over to the window and looked down. The street below was dark but she could see the lights of the traffic. She was terrified of dying, but a voice inside her kept telling her that she was "unfit" to be a member of the human race. She wrote a note to her husband and to her children, telling them that she loved them...but that this was the better way...they'd be able to start a new life without her. This inner voice kept telling her to hurry. So she opened the window, closed her eyes, sat down on the sill, said "O God" and let herself fall backward into the darkness of the early night. Down and down she went...falling five stories...and she waited for the impact of the pavement...for nothingness, for oblivion. But, instead of hitting the pavement, she smashed into the top of a parked convertible.

She went through the canvass roof and landed in the back seat. She felt an agonizing pain in her back and in her legs and then she fainted. She remembers waking up in a quiet hospital room, encased in plaster from the waist down. A young man in a white coat stood next to her and said, "I'm your doctor....how do you feel?" A wave of despair washed over her. She was still alive. She felt she was such a miserable bungler...she had failed even to do away with her self. Even death would not have her. She felt hot tears singing her eyes. Then she said, "O God...forgive me." The young doctor put his hand on her forehead and quietly said to her,

"He will....don't worry about anything....we're going to help you learn to love yourself again...." And they did.

There was something about those words....they held the truth that ultimately made it possible for this young wife and mother to rebuild her life. Today, she "glories" that Christ could lift her life....forgive her...make her well...and this brings us then to the final reason we can glory in the cross.

HE LOVES US

And that is because Christ loves us. God loves us. The person who holds up the sign at so many athletic contests has it right. You've seen him...or her...holding up that sign that says: John 3: 16. "God so loves the world that He gave His Son...."

There's a cross that stands quite tall outside the Presbyterian Church in Old Greenwich, Connecticut. It's visible...quite visible...from the street and also from the rail lines. And because of its high visibility, the architect decided to make a statement. Now this cross is made of steel. It's a kind of steel that would stain profusely and reveal its rugged character even from a distance. The architect wanted the cross to take on some "earthy tones" that would change with the weather. He wanted to project a real cross...one scarred by time...not something stainless and refined and cold. Having worked with this material before, he knew how it behaved in the elements and how unpredictable it was and yet how warm the tones could be...

But the most significant aspect about this outdoor cross never really occurred to him. When it rains, this cross drips red. Red rust. And it's probably his most powerful image. The concrete under the cross is now permanently stained and each time it rains, the cement receives a fresh new splattering. And in winter, when the sun comes out and heats up the cross after a storm, the slow melting from it drips "rust-red" holes in the pure white snow...thus reminding us

of the sacrifice Christ made long ago in our behalf. St. Paul "gloried" because of what Christ had done for him. And it's hard not to "glory" when someone loves you so much that He lays down His life in your place....and brothers and sisters "in Christ" that is something to glory in.

We began this sermon with the question or the concern: what is it that you glory in? Accomplishments? Achievements? Possessions? Family traditions and trees? We all "glory" in different things. I think Paul was putting us on the right track when He wrote to the Galatians:

"Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ!"

So go from here, remembering that Christ loves us very much. And that He's done something to lift the weight of our sins from our lives. Look back, but don't stare. Remember, He has walked where you and I sometimes walk. And there's room for us all at the foot of the cross.

PRAYER

Make us sensitive to Your nearness and to Your presence in these quiet moments, O God...here in this chapel....and confirm within us the feelings and the decisions, the resolutions and intentions of this time apart from the pressures of life. Wrestle with us in the deep and hidden corners of our lives...bring us out into the sunshine of Your love. In the spirit of Christ, the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep by name and gently calls us to Himself....in his name we now pray. Amen.

I thought of this cross up in Old Greenwich when I read earlier this year that on the 13th day of March a man named FRANCHISZEK GAJOWNICZEK died at the age of 94 in Warsaw, Poland. Even if I were to pronounce his name correctly, chances are you wouldn't recognize him and yet, the Associated Press carried his story around the world. Do you know why? Franchiszek spent years paying witness to a Franciscan monk who died in his stead at the Auschwitz Concentration Camp.

Back in July of 1941, the Nazis selected Franchiszek and nine other die of starvation as punishment for another prisoner's escape. After listening to Franchiszek speak of his wife and two son, the Reverend Maximilian Kolbe volunteered to die in Franchiszek's place. Kolbe survived more than 14 days in a starvation bunker with no food and no water. The Nazis ended Kolbe's life in August of '41 with a lethal injection.

"Ever since"....said his wife...."Franchiszek had a deep sense of Kolbe's presence. Now...he has gone to be with Kolbe".

In recognition of his selfless act the Roman Catholic Church declared Kolbe "blessed" in 1971 and canonized him in 1982. For many years the man whose life Kolbe saved traveled throughout Europe and even here in our own country giving talks about the saint and laying cornerstones for churches in his name.

Franchiszek gloried in what Maximilian Kolbe did in his behalf. St. Paul "gloried" because of what Christ had done for him. It's hard not to "glory" when someone loves you so much that He lays down His life in your place. And brothers and sisters....to me that is something to glory in. Go from here this hour remembering that Christ loves us that much. He's done something to lift the weight of our sins from our lives. He has walked where you and I walk.

We began with the question: what is it you "glory" in? Your accomplishments? Your clothes? Your family tree or family traditions? Your possessions? Paul was putting us on the right track when He wrote to the Galatians:

"Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ!"

PRAYER

Make us sensitive to Your nearness and to Your presence in these quiet moments, O God...that come at the end of this service. And confirm within us the feelings....the decisions and intentions of this time apart in Your presence. Wrestle with us in the deep and hidden corners of our lives.....remind us that there is lots of room at the foot of the cross and may we like Paul....grow in our understanding of what it means so that one day, we, too....like Paul may be led to say:

"Far be it from me to glory in anything, but in the life and love of Christ, Our Lord".

For it is in His name we now pray. Amen.

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Now, this is a handy system and he's probably going to make money on it. It would not be paying off for its designer if there were not so many people out there carrying around so much guilt. Guilt may just be the most serious undiscussed problem in our society. There are people who are lying in hospital beds today because of unresolved guilt. There are marriages under stress and in danger of coming apart because of secrets that are gnawing away at one spouse. There are people who are engaged in all kinds of destructive behavior because they do not know how to heal the past.

Norman Vincent Peale once told of a young mother who had been unfaithful to her husband and found she could not rid herself of the guilt. She asked God to forgive her, but she could not forgive herself. She began to feel that everyone knew her terrible, dark secret and everyone would be better off without her. She felt she was bringing disgrace to everyone in her family and that without her they could hopefully start life anew. And so without saying a word to anyone she packed a small suitcase and registered in an assumed name at the tallest hotel.

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Down and down she went...falling five stories. She waited for the impact of the pavement...for nothingness and for oblivion. But instead she smashed into the top of a parked convertible. She went through the canvass roof and landed in the back seat. She felt an agonizing pain in her back and in her legs and then she fainted. She remembers waking up in a quiet hospital room, encased in plaster from the waist down. A young man in a white coat stood next to her and said, "I'm your doctor...how do you feel?"

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