

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
September 22, 2013**

***“Christ’s Love, Our Calling”
Year 4: Love Speaks***

Phillippians 3:4-11

Love Speaks Sacrificially

- 1. About a message of sacrifice**
- 2. About a life of sacrifice**

Hymns: 230 – 465 – Closing: “Shine, Jesus, Shine”

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Philippians 3:4-11 –

If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Have you ever been told, “You’re going the wrong way!” Going the wrong way can be funny. Yesterday we had the Holy Trinity Road Rally with teams competing in a scavenger hunt-type race. When a team gets on the wrong track and can’t locate a place, it can be a bit humorous. You know that they’re going to

be searching for quite a while to find that location, because they’re going the wrong way!

Going the wrong way can be frustrating. For a family that has been on the road all day driving, they might want to get to their hotel soon to get their exhausted bodies to bed. If dad is having trouble finding the place, frustration will soon be expressed.

Going the wrong way can be tragic. How many of us haven’t seen a news report where a car going the wrong way on the freeway hits another vehicle. Perhaps the driver is killed in the process, all because he was going the wrong way.

As we continue this service series that our Wisconsin Synod churches are enjoying called **“Love Speaks,”** today we see the importance of going the right way. That’s why we’re considering the thoughts that the Apostle Paul wrote about in Philippians 3. **These words will remind us that “Love Speaks Sacrificially.”** Let’s learn two ways that our love speaks in this way about the “right way.”

1. About a message of sacrifice

Our reading from Philippians 3 began, *“If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.”* Paul’s words begin with an edgy tone. What was happening in the church at Philippi?

It was the same thing that was happening in a number of congregations that Paul had founded. A group of false teachers often followed Paul and spoke against him after he had preached the gospel in a city. These teachers were called “Judaizers.” Their aim was to take the message that Jesus is the Savior of the world and add Old Testament laws to the way of salvation. They were big fans of the Old Testament laws that God had given to Moses, most notably circumcision, and they did not want to give those laws up. They preached that Jesus was the Savior, but that you still had to do some things to be forgiven and saved. They

made salvation partly God's work and partly man's work. It's understandable why they did that. The Jewish nation had been following the laws of Moses for centuries. Many had fallen under the impression that these laws were permanent. But God had given the Ceremonial Law, such as circumcision, for his Old Testament people until the Messiah would come to fulfill and end it. They were wrong.

These teachers attacked Paul's background and his ministry. Therefore, he defends himself. Speaking very candidly in their terms of qualifications, law-keeping, and accomplishments, Paul goes onto their turf and compares his credentials to theirs:

- Circumcised on the 8th day – As far as obedience to the law of circumcision, Paul had fulfilled it exactly as God had commanded in the Old Testament. How many of these Judaizers, many of whom were later converts to Christianity, could claim that?
- From the people of Israel – Did they want to talk about ethnic purity? How many people of the Jewish nation, after the exile, belonged to a mixed race of people? But Paul tells them he wasn't. If they want to make pedigree a big deal, his pedigree was not polluted.
- From the tribe of Benjamin – He was a member of one of the two tribes of the south in the divided kingdom, which had remained mostly intact through Old Testament history.
- A Hebrew of Hebrews – An Israelite through and through, with a pure genealogy.
- In law-keeping, a Pharisee – Paul had been a Pharisee, of course. That sect had been legendary in not only keeping laws, but also adding their own. They banned 39 types of activities on the Sabbath and

upheld 613 total Old Testament laws, more than was even commanded in the law of Moses.

- In zeal, a persecutor – Paul's zeal before his conversion had been so rabid for Old Testament laws that he – as one who rejected the message of Jesus as its fulfiller – had led persecutions of Christians. He had watched the coats of the men who stoned Stephen. He had gone far from Jerusalem to arrest Christians. He had zealously persecuted the Church.
- In legalism, faultless – "Legalism" is the keeping of laws. If anyone wanted to make legalism the way of salvation, Paul had outwardly kept it in his piety!

Paul had formerly not simply been a Pharisee in his day; he was an MVP!

However, what does he say about his background and his former law-keeping life? *"But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."* Paul's perspective now that he has come to know Christ and the true way of salvation is that those things are rubbish. The word Paul uses here is quite vivid. By definition, this word could be equated to "pig slop," or an even more graphic type of refuse.

Why does Paul use such strong language for his background and accomplishments? He calls all of this pig slop (or worse) because God converted his heart of stone to believe in the true Way of salvation, a sacrificial Way. The Way is not by works. It is not by pedigree. It is not by accomplishment. It is sacrificial. The Way is through the sacrifice of Christ for the sin

of the world on the cross. Paul had described this sacrifice of Jesus in the previous chapter: *“Christ Jesus... being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!”*

When we could not be perfect or even make up for our sins and guilt by our own accomplishments, God sent his Son to be a willing sacrifice for them on the cross. He emptied himself of his power and glory to serve as our Savior. When this Savior had been promised in the Old Testament, the laws of Moses had served their purpose as a hedge around God’s people to keep them separate from the nations of the world. They had been given to keep them pious, godly, and looking ahead to this Savior to come. **But they were never intended to be a way to earn salvation. In fact, if you think this is true, you should consider your feeble works to be what they are: Refuse, and even a loss if you think they are bringing you close to God by their merit.**

This is why Paul had left his MVP life. Through faith in the Savior, he now knew the true Way of salvation. And this is the message he preached to all who would listen. It’s all about Christ’s sacrifice. **Paul spoke “sacrificially.”**

As we think about Paul’s sacrificial message, it’s good for us to examine our perspective on this. What might our sinful flesh be tempted to appeal to, if we want to “feel right with God?” Our own instinct might be to say that we feel good about our chances in God’s judgment on the Last Day because:

- I was raised in this church. I’ve been a member for a long time.
- I was raised in a pastor or teacher’s family.
- I’ve gone to Lutheran schools my whole life.

- I worship at God’s house every Sunday.
- I give a lot of money to charity.
- I’ve served on boards and committees many times.
- I volunteer many hours of my time for God.
- I built churches!
- I’ve raised a family and expended much time and effort for my spouse and children.
- “I try hard to keep God’s laws. Many people today in our world aren’t even trying!”

If this is what you are tempted to base our comfort on, you need to start thinking sacrificially. The things I mentioned aren’t ignoble things – in fact, they are works to be encouraged. But if you are thinking of those acts in the light of your justification in God’s court, you are not thinking sacrificially, and you are going the wrong way. When it comes to your salvation, you need to jettison those things immediately. When a ship is in a great storm and in danger of going down, the crew will throw the cargo overboard. It’s only weighting the boat down. When your life is coming to an end, because your body is wearing out, or when Judgment Day is breaking all around you, jettison your good works as your hope of heaven. **Realize that the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ are your hope and plea in God’s court, and because he has promised that Jesus’ sacrifice for your sins has been completed, you stand on solid ground and are saved!**

As our love speaks to the world around us, this has implications for us. We have been sent as witnesses to a world that operates on the premise that you earn what you get. Every person has a built-in feeling that what they do directly impacts everything that they receive. It’s the way the business world works. It’s the way education works too.

But this is not the way salvation works. Our message to our friends and acquaintances in the world needs to be sacrificial. Only in the sacrifice of Jesus will they find the salvation that God has provided and of which Paul speaks today. Otherwise, they're going the wrong way!

When we think about it, we see a message that is even unique among all the religions of the world. Some people have wondered, "How do you know that the religion of the Bible is different from other world religions from history?" After all, many people today follow such religions. An important thing to remember is that the Bible's message is different from every world religion in this way: It's sacrificial. Every religion that man has made up bases its hope on what you do. Pray enough to your idol. Be good enough to your fellow man. Follow these laws enough. But the true Way that God has revealed is different. It's been done, done through the sacrifice of his Son, our Savior.

2. About a life of sacrifice

We hear one other point about sacrifice today, for Paul's words conclude in this way: "*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.*"

Look at what Paul lists as his "goals" in life now:

1. He wanted to share in Christ's sufferings.
2. He wanted to somehow attain to the resurrection.

We could put it this way: Paul wanted to "sacrifice" his life now, because he realized the way that Christ had sacrificed for him.

Let's look at those two concepts briefly and think about them for ourselves. Paul wanted to "join in Christ's sufferings." What a concept! In fact, the word for "joining" here is the same word as "fellowship." What did Paul mean?

He certainly did not mean that he could contribute in any way to the sufferings of Jesus that won our salvation. That would contradict

the point that he just made. Yet he and all believers are partners in the suffering of Christ in another way. Jesus said in Luke 9, "*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it*" (vv. 23,24). You might remember that Christ carried his own cross out to the place of crucifixion. For those who follow Christ in this life, they follow behind, carrying crosses as well. When we become like Christ and follow him, we will endure ridicule and hardship. We will suffer, due to the foreign message that we carry and due to those who oppose this message in our world.

Paul made it a priority to share in the sufferings of Jesus. Is such a priority ours?

Paul also says that he wants to "*become like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.*" He uses another interesting word here. "Become like" has the literal picture of "taking the form of." Paul wants to die and rise as Christ did! This is Paul's ultimate goal: To share in the experience of dying and resurrecting like Christ. In the light of that, nothing else matters. A pastor in our synod shared what was said at the time of the death of his 20-year old sister. A friend said to his father, "Your ultimate goal in raising her was that she would spend eternity with her Savior. The goal has been reached. Not the way you planned but ahead of schedule." Can you see why this is such an important perspective on life and death? When we realize the goal of our Christian lives, it puts everything in perspective and moves our love to speak.

The life of sacrifice that Paul describes here has implications for our speaking. We have to realize that our message about our lives now will be different from motivational speeches that you will hear. It will be different from infomercials that will tell you how you deserve all the best products you can buy. It will be different from some preachers' messages today that guarantee earthly prosperity for following Christ. The true message is a sacrificial message. As faithful Christians, we will share in

the sufferings of Christ as we strive for the same goal, the resurrection, that the Apostle Paul strove for.

Are you going the right way? This is an important question that we started with today! What is the right way of which our love speaks?

It is a sacrificial message:

1. **About a message of sacrifice**

2. **About a life of sacrifice**

As we hear about God's Way of salvation and service today, may he move us to take up our cross and follow him and may he lead us safely home through this life on the Way that he has prepared! Amen.