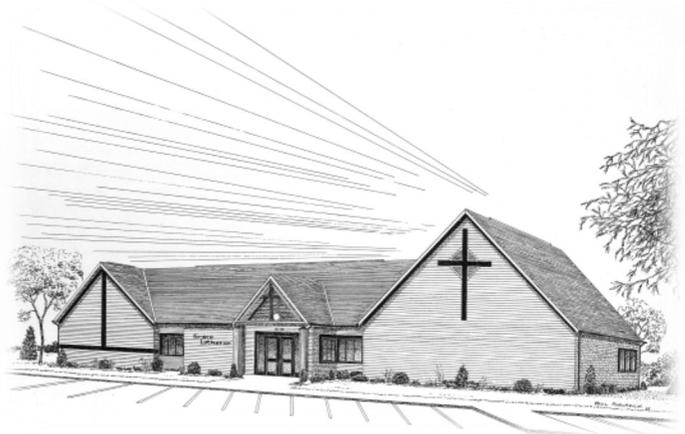




The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
October 19, 2014
Pastor Daniel Naumann
2 Corinthians 13:5-8
EXAMINE YOURSELF



Do you know what today is? Of course, coming to church here at Grace, you all know that it's the Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost because I just can't seem to get through an introduction to the service without mentioning the season of the church year. But that's not what I'm talking about. Did you know that today is a holiday? October 19th is *Evaluate Your Life Day*. Here's a description of the day from holidayinsights.com:

Evaluate Your Life Day is a bit scary. It sounds just a little bit too serious for my liking. And, what if I evaluate my life, and find out that I don't like it???????? Well, for starters, you can then make positive changes. Evaluate Your Life Day gives us the opportunity to pause and reflect upon our life, where it's been, and where it's going. C'mon, be honest with yourself. Are things going well? What is bothering you? What do you need, or want, to change? How's your appearance? Are you gaining too much weight? With a self evaluation, you can then make big changes to improve the quality of your life, as necessary. Or, if things are going well, just tinker with small adjustments. We believe that Evaluate Your Life Day is the beginning of a happier and healthier you!

So, how do you think you would do on *Evaluate Your Life Day*? Are things going the way you want them to? As the author of this website states right at the beginning, it can be pretty scary to evaluate your life. What if you see something you don't want to see?

In 2 Corinthians 13, Paul also urges us to evaluate, or examine our lives. But Paul isn't just talking about the way you look or how much you weigh. Paul says, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith, test yourselves." If you think evaluating your appearance or your weight or your job or your earthly

life is scary, how about evaluating your spiritual—your eternal life? Talk about scary, this can be downright terrifying! What if you see something you don't want to see?

Why does Paul urge the Corinthians, and us, to examine ourselves? Well the truth was Paul himself was being placed under a microscope. There were some among the Corinthians who were trying to say that Paul was not a true Apostle. Paul himself dealt with this issue on a number of occasions, and it's easy to understand why. Paul wasn't sent out at the same time as the other Apostles. Paul was converted on his way to Damascus and was sent out by Jesus separately to the Gentiles. It's easy to use that as an argument against

Paul being a true Apostle, which some false teachers had done in Corinth. As a result of some claiming that Paul wasn't a true Apostle and therefore his message couldn't be trusted, the Corinthians were demanding proof that what Paul preached was really from God.

2 Corinthians 13:3 says, "You are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me." The Corinthians wanted proof that Paul's preaching was really the Gospel—that it was from God. Paul's defense, his answer, his proof—it was the Corinthians themselves. "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you?" In other words, Paul was saying that if his message wasn't really the Gospel of Christ, then they wouldn't have faith and wouldn't be believers at all. The Corinthians were the proof that Paul's message was from God.

How were they supposed to examine themselves? What was the test? What was the proof of their faith? This is where the self-evaluation gets scary. The proof of their faith is their fruits of faith. The proof of their faith is their works. Now I know what you're going to say. Wait a minute pastor! If Paul wants us to examine



ourselves to see if we have faith, and we're supposed to look at our works, then we're all in trouble because when I examine myself and look at my works then I know I don't see what I want to see. I don't always live up to what God expects. I don't always live up to the truth as Paul puts it in verse 8 of our text.

Or to put it in terms of the Gospel reading for this morning: which son are you? Are you the son who says all the right things but doesn't really put them into action? Or are you the son that actually does what God tells you to do? Now that is a scary question. It's a scary question because we know the truth of Jesus' parable. Too often when we examine our lives, we see the glaring times when our sinful nature does the opposite of what God has told us to do. Sure, like that second son in Jesus' parable, we may say the right things but our actions don't follow through or our hearts are far from those actions. If we examine ourselves like Paul urges us to do here, that is truly a terrifying thing to do because we know what we will see.

So what did that first son do in the parable? What happened between the time when he refused to do what his father said and then he did it? He repented. He turned to God for forgiveness, just like we do every day. And what do we find when we go to him? We find not a Father who is ready to punish us, but a loving Father who is ready to embrace us because of the forgiveness given to us by Christ. You see, there is a third Son that isn't mentioned in the parable. He's the Son who said, "Yes Father, I'll willingly do exactly what you say," and then he went and did it. That third, unmentioned Son is none other than Jesus himself.

What happens when we examine ourselves and see those times when we don't do what God demands? We find them all taken away, forgiven in Christ, paid for in full by his sacrifice on the cross, and we find those sins replaced with Christ's perfect obedience to everything his Father asked him to do. When we examine ourselves through the lens of faith in Christ we see sins forgiven and Christ's perfection covering us completely so that we can stand in confidence before our Father as having perfectly fulfilled all requirements through Christ.

So, as Paul says, examine yourselves. See what your life looks like in view of Christ's forgiveness. What do you find there? You find a life of thanksgiving for what Christ has done for you. You find fruits of your faith. You find times when you do exactly what your Father has asked you to do. Just like Paul says in 2 Corinthians, you find that you do the right things. "Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test but that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but

only for the truth." What is Paul's hope for the Corinthians? His hope is that they live a life that is fitting of a believer. And the truth is they live that life. They do live a life that is fitting for a believer. How do they know? Because God gives believers opportunities to do good works.

This is exactly what Paul says in a different letter, in Ephesians 2:8-9, verses that you probably know well, where he explains that we are saved by grace through faith. And then in verse 10 Paul gives the proof of that faith—the very works which God has provided for us. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." You see, take the test. Why are you saved? You're saved because of God's grace through Christ—that he sent a Savior to live and die for you. Through faith in this Savior you receive forgiveness. How do you know you have faith? God took care of that too, by preparing fruits of faith for you to do, good works which give evidence of your faith.

These fruits of faith, these good works which God prepared for you to do, will look different in every believer's life. The believer who faithfully gets up and goes to work to provide for his family as a good husband and father has that daily evidence of faith. The believer who stays home with her children to care for them has that daily evidence of faith, a fruit done out of love for Christ. The believer who shares Jesus with a neighbor has that evidence of faith. Any good work you do is a fruit of your faith. And the truth is, you may not even be looking to do these, and in fact you may not even realize that you are doing them. Think of what Jesus said to the sheep and the goats. In Matthew 25, Jesus said that when he comes again on the Last Day, he will separate the sheep, the believers, on his right and the goats, the unbelievers, on his left. And what did he tell the believers on his right? He showed them all the times when they faithfully did a good work of faith. They didn't even realize that they were doing it, yet Jesus says they had the proof, the evidence, of their faith. And just to make sure that you wouldn't obsess and worry over whether you have done enough of those good works, those fruits of faith, God prepared them in advance to you to do, and he promised that you they would be there on the Last Day.

So, examine yourself. Don't be afraid of *Evaluate Your Life Day*. As a believer, we constantly evaluate our lives. And what do we see? We see Jesus' perfection. We see our Savior. We see faith in him. We see fruits of that faith. We see what God sees: Perfection because of Jesus. Amen.