



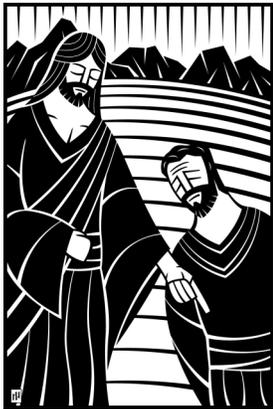
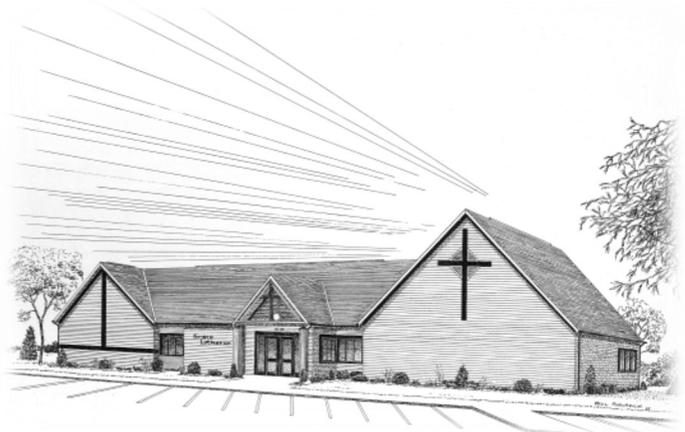
The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 21, 2014

Pastor Daniel Naumann

Galatians 6:12-16

## BOAST IN THE CROSS OF CHRIST



How would you like to go on a first century style missionary journey? How would you like to have accompanied Paul on one of his famous trips? Think of the places you would go and the roads you would walk—the cities, the buildings, the ships, the sites! But of course, Paul wasn't traveling to see any of those. He had something far more important

in mind than any of that. Paul traveled to see the people. Think of the people you would meet. The souls. Souls upon souls. The lives that Paul touched, it's simply amazing, isn't it? Truly a work of God!

Did you know that most historians estimate that if you add up all of the length of Paul's missionary journeys and take out any time spent on a ship, Paul would have walked somewhere in the realm of 4,400 miles? That's a long way and a lot of places to go—a lot of people to meet! One of those places was a region named Galatia. Our letter this morning was written not so much to a single congregation, like we think of with so many of Paul's other letters. Galatians was a letter written to a group of congregations in a larger region called Galatia. These congregations were probably spread across the area that Paul traveled to on his first missionary journey. In other words, these were the great Paul's first congregations.

You know from your own pastors how near and dear to the heart a congregation can be to a pastor. That much more so for a first congregation. The Galatian congregations were certainly near and dear to Paul. He was concerned about them. This is what makes the letter to the Galatians so alarming.

Paul found out that there was some false teaching going on among these Galatian congregations. A group of Christians were trying to convince these Galatian gentiles—these non-Jews—that they need to follow all

the Jewish laws in order to be saved. The law Paul picks on the most as a representation of all the rest of the laws was circumcision. This group of false teachers has become known as the *Judaizers*. It's difficult for us, 2000 years removed from the letter to the Galatians, to reconstruct the situation and the arguments. The fact is that we really only have one side of the debate. We don't know the exact origin of this false teaching. These men may have been Jews by ancestry who just felt too pulled back by their heritage to leave it behind. We see that happen to some of the Jews in the book of Acts. Even Peter himself struggled with this at times. They may also have been gentiles, non-Jews (perhaps Greeks), who felt very pressured by Jews to give up their Christianity. We don't know the exact situation.

What we do know is that what these false teachers were advocating was so damaging to the basics of the Christian faith and to the Galatians that Paul says they had lost the Gospel, that they had fallen from faith, and that the Galatians were in danger of abandoning grace because of this false teaching. Those are some pretty strong accusations. That's some pretty strong language for Paul to use—and rightfully so! When our very faith is at stake it becomes a serious matter.

Why would these Judaizers, these false teachers, do such a thing? Paul gives their motivation in our text this morning as he summarizes the whole letter to the Galatians. "Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh." These Judaizers, whoever they were, were motivated by one thing: they didn't like suffering as Christians. When the Jews came around trying to stomp out Christianity in the first century, these Judaizers took on a halfway point between Judaism and Christianity. They abandoned the teaching that Christ had fulfilled the law, and they said you still had to obey all the old requirements to show

that you were saved. These Judaizers abandoned grace, and they tried to get the Galatians to do the same.

We don't really have Judaizers in that same sense today. Sure, there are those around who try to get us to follow salvation through our works instead of salvation through faith. But when we consider Paul's warning about these Judaizers' motivation I think we begin to see a threat to us today that is motivated by the exact same thing that those Judaizers were motivated by. "The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ." There are people like that all over the world today, aren't there?

You heard Jesus' words in the Gospel this morning. Do you remember them? He told Peter and the other disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Jesus told his disciples, and us, to expect to suffer in this life. He told his disciples, and us, to expect the cross, to expect persecution, to expect to be different from the rest of the world. But those aren't words we like to hear, are they? When we're faced with the cross we would rather take the easy way out, wouldn't we? A crude joke is made among friends and instead of speaking up we hide our true feelings of disgust because we just don't really want to get into it, and after all it is a little funny, isn't it? When a professor is breathing down the neck of a Christian in the classroom today, insisting that evolution is superior to creation, it's just a lot easier to keep my mouth shut rather than pick up my cross and stand up for the truth of God's Word. When hot topic issues about religion spill over into politics it's a lot simpler to take a more progressive stance on those issues—like abortion, or same-sex marriage, or female clergy—instead of letting the clear words of Scripture be the end of the debate. After all, there are just so many so-called "Christians" who have found that middle ground between the two sides anyway, and they seem to be doing just fine. Just like those Judaizers of old, there are many who think they can have a crossless Christianity. They think they can be believers without bearing their cross.

The reality, however, is utterly terrifying. Christianity without the cross is a Christianity without Christ, and is therefore no Christianity at all. That is abandoning the faith altogether, which is scary ground to find yourself standing on.

That's why we boast in the cross of Christ. May Paul's words, the Holy Spirit's words, always be our words as well. "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." Do you face persecution for your faith? I know you do, because you're a believer. Find comfort in the cross of Christ. There we see a Savior from

sin. There we see that God wants so much more for us than just an easy life here. If all Jesus came to do was give to us an easy life, then we would be lost for all eternity. But he came to do so much more. He came, as he told his disciples, to "go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."

You see, from the very beginning Jesus always had in mind his cross. He never once shied away from it or ran from it. He willingly took on his cross in full force so that we would never have to face his cross, which was to suffer hell in our place and pay for sin once for all. We have been set free from that cross for all eternity. God has in mind so much more than just an easy life here for us. He has in mind an eternity with him. That's exactly what he gave us through Jesus. He proved it by raising him from the dead, his stamp of approval on everything he did. Because Jesus paid for our sins through his cross he has brought us peace and mercy. This is the rule that we follow as Paul says. It's not a rule that we must fulfill in order to gain salvation. It's a fact, a truth, a standard, that God is merciful and he showed it by lovingly giving us heaven through Jesus.

This is the cross. Take the world, but give me Jesus. And with Jesus comes the cross. I don't want to have the world or anything in it. That's what Paul says in verse 14. "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me," in other words, I know that I will never have the world nor be part of the world—I'm a believer—"and I to the world." The world will never have me because I rest securely in the arms of my Savior and in his cross.

When we see all that we have in Christ—salvation, forgiveness, new life, eternity in heaven, the love of God—and then we see all that is taken away by Christ—sin, guilt, hell, damnation and punishment—then we are able to bear up under our cross. I will gladly boast in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, because his cross, even though it means my cross now, means eternity with him in heaven. That's something I can live with. Amen.

