

7-3-2016

## Propers 9 (Pentecost 7) Series C 2016

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### Recommended Citation

Brandt, Phillip L., "Propers 9 (Pentecost 7) Series C 2016" (2016). *Sunday's Sermon*. 158.  
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## Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, July 3 (Proper 9)

A name written in heaven, Jesus urges us to rejoice for a name written in heaven. What does one do with that sort of an exhortation? I don't know about you, but that can really be a tough sell when you are talking to a suffering soul. It comes across like I am offering a hope but not a help. "Great I get to go to heaven, but what about my hurt right now?"

Platonic dualism, not Scripture, tells me to suppress my tears and rejoice at a funeral or to endure some terrible thing because the suffering of today is not really suffering. Scripture has a different message for us. In Genesis God labels death as the result of a broken creation, suffering, hard work, pain, sickness, all of it is not normal, but a broken reality. Paul exhorts us to not to mourn like other men (I Thess 4:13) but we still mourn, it is just that our mourning is done in hope. Peter encourages us to endure our suffering and persecution differently because our baptism has changed everything but he never says the suffering is not real or is not evil. Jesus does not suggest that the end of the world is not terrifying and painful. He reframes that suffering as birth pangs, but the suffering is acknowledged and given hope.

The Christian preacher must play this with care. Christian language easily slops into an overstatement and thus the error of the platonic outlook on life. Yes, heaven is real, but so is this world in which we live. (Platonism says that this world is not the true reality. True reality is in the realm of ideas which many Christians have equated with heaven. The closest we get to this language is in the letter to the Hebrews, but then in chapter 9-10, he collapses the whole platonic world. Jesus is the idea in the flesh, something which Platonism could never imagine.)

Why is this important? It is important because Platonism actually devalues the kingdom of God. It sounds like this talk elevates God's kingdom to heaven, but it is not so. God did not save us from afar, but he sent his only begotten son to breathe the poisoned air of this world to rescue people. He did not save us by bringing us out of this world, but by promulgating a kingdom which exists in this world right now, a kingdom of faith and hope. That kingdom was evidenced as present in every leper cleansed, demoniac freed, blind man seeing, and dead man walking during Jesus' ministry. It continues to be seen in every poor man fed, every sin forgiven, every hospital with a cross on it, and every time an otherwise forgotten woman in a nursing looks and smiles at her pastor walking through the door.

I am increasingly thinking that the word "save" has become too jingoistic. It is packed with too many memories and too much baggage for us to hear freshly. Many who hear this word are brought back to revivals and folks who wonder if they are "saved." Jesus came to **rescue** to the world (Jn 3:17.) That means more than just our souls, it simply means us and every human being, indeed the whole of creation in all its physicality. (Colossians 1 is a great place to read about this – and get ready for that since we will reading Colossians in a week or so.) That preaching of Jesus' rescue (salvation) of the whole world is called objective justification and it is what empowers our preaching.

At its worst, this platonic world view lets God off the hook. He really doesn't need to help me here, since of course he has helped me by giving me heaven. But if we let God off the hook that way and suggest that the rescue of God is only a future reality, then we are failing to preach the full rescue of God. Jesus healed the sick, he fed the hungry, he comforted the sinner, and he loved the people that he met. Yes, we do acknowledge the future reality of heaven, but heaven is not the whole story and it may be distracting us from the more important story of today. God is very concerned about today, the hungry man or woman, the cancer which ravages a body, the heart disease which threatens our life, the anxiety of not being able to make a mortgage payment.

Christian preaching proclaims a kingdom come as well as a kingdom coming. It is now and not yet, but if modern Protestantism has a fault it is to focus on the not yet to the exclusion of the now. Modern liberal movements often attempt to rectify this by drawing attention to social justice issues, but too often these efforts, for all their merit, fall flat because they overcompensate and thereby lose the spiritual dimension altogether. As Pope Francis said, recently, without Christ and heaven and faith, the Church is just another lousy NGO. We might ask the question: Why anyone would join a congregation which does not believe in God? If there is no God there, why would anyone actually be part of the organization with its rules and bylaws and strictures?

What is more, this idea of a kingdom which is either here or there but not both here and there is just not a good reading of the Bible itself. Paul himself will not let us think this way. The church here on earth is the body of Christ, notice the present tense there. Paul's argument for a gracious, unconditional love by God for the sinner in Galatians hangs on the idea that they started in the Spirit. They are called to remember the experience they had of a rescue when Paul preached. If that was not a real experience, in this time and place, his whole argument falls apart.

Today as we preach, we will again proclaim the kingdom of God in this world. Through word and sacrament, Jesus will be present, the rescuer has come. That does not mean the problems go away, but it changes the way that we react to them and the solutions that we present to them. Yes, we now contend in hope. What we do as human beings in this life is very important because it is infused with the very life of Christ. That is what it means to take that body and blood of Jesus inside ourselves in worship. He will go with us out these doors into a world which desperately needs him. Through me, He will act. The victory is ultimately won but we strive to the goodness that God has set before us because that is the goal of our faith. It is not tomorrow, it is today.

The preacher might want to play off the fact that this is Fourth of July weekend. 153 years ago this week the nation was convulsed by the terrors of the Civil War and over 50,000 men were killed, wounded, or captured in battle on the fields of Gettysburg between July 1 and July 3. That is more casualties than Iraq and Afghanistan combined, and we racked that up in a single three day battle. A name written on a tombstone in the miles of cemeteries in Arlington or Gettysburg or the military cemetery down the road from your parish, is glorious, but even more glorious is the name written in heaven.

If you are really adventurous you might also think about citizenship. The recent leaks of the NSA documents have a lot of folks talking about the constitution and what it means to be an American who lives under the Bill of Rights. There is a debate about whether Snowden was a hero or a traitor. Having one's name attached to a country, swearing one's name to something like that as a soldier or a contractor, has meaning. It may mean this young man goes to jail for a very long time. For good or for ill, what this man did cannot be neutral – it is meaningful because of the name that he bore as both citizen and the oath he swore as an employee with a security contractor.

What does it mean that in Baptism our names were written in heaven and Christ's name was attached to us? Surely, it means that our actions likewise have meaning. Our accuser will want to use the importance of our deeds against us. He will suggest that our names in the book of life have black marks next to our names. But he is playing on our pride there. My sins are not bigger than Jesus blood and the righteousness he has earned for me in his death and resurrection for me. My name in the book of life is written in the blood of Jesus, it glows with his holy light, it is there because he has made me perfect. My name in the book of life has no asterisk next to it. I am not in the record book by virtue of using some spiritual steroid. I am rightly there by Christ.

Baptism is important here. It makes us Christians – it establishes God's promise to us. Our confession and repentance and the absolution which follows is not establishing the forgiveness of God, we live in that. The repentance and confession we make are simply living out the reality of Baptism. It is heartfelt and genuine sorrow, but it is not sorrow to which God reacts, but it is a reaction to the love of God.

### **Collect of the Day**

Almighty God, You have built Your Church on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone. Continue to send Your messengers to preserve Your people in true peace that, by the preaching of Your word, Your Church may be kept free from all harm and danger; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

*Notice in the prayer that the "Your" pronoun appears five times. God has built his church, and this congregation is an expression of His Church. Think about that. It wasn't the generous gift of the family who donated the land nor was it the cheerfully given tithes that paid the contractor. God called and gathered his people into this place. As builder, God lays claim to this assembly. It is his. One of the best ordination/installation sermons I heard suggested that the preacher needed to eschew the idea that this was his church, rather it was God's church. That meant the preacher could not take the credit or the blame for what happened, but he could serve that parish.*

*Another good sermon I heard once was a District President preaching at the dedication of a church building. He said that when Jesus came on the last day he should find the carpet threadbare, the doors scratched and worn, the facility showing the signs of hard use. It was his building to serve his kingdom, not our treasure. We dare not yell at the kid who spills Kool-aide and thereby value the carpet more than the child.*

*Our world suggests that we join churches. The people are there because they chose to be there. We don't use the language of called and gathered by the Holy Spirit when we talk about evangelism and growth. It is not just parishioners who struggle with this, but Preachers also are wont to speak of "my" church. Do it often enough and even though you will admit that you don't really own the church, you sound like you do and deep down you probably believe it.*

*Upon the foundation of Apostles and Prophets, that is another way of saying Scripture, but please notice that this is a church built on a foundation. Follow along with that metaphor. The foundation is pretty useless unless the building gets put up. The foundation is not the building. It is critically important, but not the building. The bible does not exist for itself but for the mission and ministry of God through the Church. The Bible does not get saved and brought to heaven. God saves people and brings them to heaven.*

*But also remember that this use of the word Church is not about the physical building. The metaphorical building is what we are about as a congregation, it is the people that God has gathered and the kingdom he brings about through them. God did not create the Church to be a museum for the words of Apostles and Prophets but a living community of people built upon the revelation which came through those men who were carried along by the Spirit. The Church does the same things that Jesus did in the Gospels – feeding hungry, proclaiming forgiveness, caring for the sick, etc. It is the embodiment of Christ, the King, and his Kingdom, in this place. It will look like him and he gets to define both its purpose and mission.*

*Christ Jesus is the corner stone – Psalm 118:22 is the most quoted/alluded OT passage in the whole NT. Our whole existence as a church hangs on the One who has risen from the dead. He is the center of our Church. He defines it.*

*Continue to send your messengers, notice the idea that this is not a new sending, but a continuance of the old sending. The Greek word for messenger is "Angelos" from which we also get the word "Angel." When John sees the seven angels of the seven churches in the opening verses of Revelation, he may well be referring to the preachers who are in those parishes. Those angels are held in the hands of Jesus.*

*Lutherans are reformers, not restorationists. These sent messengers are important because they preserve the people in peace. I think this is intentionally used in year C. Around this time we are always getting ready for a convention in year C. Our peace rests on God's work through his servants. (Hey that's us guys)*

*In the ancient world messengers would have been sent out to the various corners of the Roman Empire to announce the death of the old emperor and the new rule of the new emperor. This proclamation would have brought with it the reality of the new emperor's reign. When Jesus sends out messengers he is tapping into an existing metaphor/structure which the people would have already been familiar with. What is like this today? When Jesus' disciples announced the kingdom of God, the people heard something they were already familiar with.*

*A new pastor, president, governor, or anything else in today's world really doesn't cut it as an image for us in this regard. We don't pull in all the old coins and recast them with the image of the new president after every election. These new emperors started minting new coins with his image. The everyday experience of these people would be changed by this announcement. The closest thing might be England today as the money has an image of Queen Elizabeth on it. When she dies, it will change to Charles.*

*We might talk about the news of 9/11 which changed the way all of us fly. Perhaps we might talk about Microsoft issuing a new operating system. All of us who use a computer and are forced eventually into that system will find our everyday tasks changed. Windows 10 is not an eternal kingdom, of course; although, when you are waiting for an update from Microsoft it might feel like an eternity.*

*By the preaching of your word the church may be kept free from harm and danger. Sounds like the word "Rescue" to me. The preaching of peace brings rescue from harm and danger. What do you think the harm and danger is? That will probably show up in your sermons. Is it external or internal? Is it threats from without, the culture and generally bad stuff that afflicts us or is it the false teaching, the spiritual apathy, the dissension or something else that is inside the body of Christ?*

*Your answer will say much about you and something about Jesus.*

## **Readings**

Isaiah 66:10-14

<sup>10</sup> "Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her,  
all you who love her;  
rejoice with her in joy,  
all you who mourn over her;  
<sup>11</sup> that you may nurse and be satisfied  
from her consoling breast;  
that you may drink deeply with delight  
from her glorious abundance."

<sup>12</sup> For thus says the LORD:  
"Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river,  
and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream;

and you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip,  
and bounced upon her knees.

<sup>13</sup> As one whom his mother comforts,  
so I will comfort you;  
you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

<sup>14</sup> You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice;  
your bones shall flourish like the grass;  
and the hand of the LORD shall be known to his servants,  
and he shall show his indignation against his enemies.

<sup>15</sup> *“For behold, the LORD will come in fire,  
and his chariots like the whirlwind,  
to render his anger in fury,  
and his rebuke with flames of fire.*

<sup>16</sup> *For by fire will the LORD enter into judgment,  
and by his sword, with all flesh;  
and those slain by the LORD shall be many.*

*I thought it worth including these extra verses just so we don't forget what Isaiah and his audience meant by God's rescue of Jerusalem. It was violent and involved the death of the enemy, not some sort of gentle accommodation. We are engaged in a real war as members of the Church militant. Our enemies of sin and death and devil have no mercy or pity for us and we dare not believe that we can negotiate a settlement with them by which we both will live together in some faux peace. This is total war, no quarter given!*

*We wrote earlier about citizenship. Again, since this is Fourth of July weekend, I wonder what of our citizenship in this nation we value? What do we value about our citizenship in God's kingdom that we should rejoice that God is rising up to defend Jerusalem for us. What comfort is ours? What nourishment do we take from this kingdom?*

*Isaiah is pointing the folks of that time to see a day when they will take for granted the safety and comfort of Jerusalem just as an infant assumes the love his his/her mother. Remember that when Isaiah wrote, Jerusalem was a raw and bitter wound on the psyche of the Jewish people. They were hurting from the destruction of the temple and burning of the city by the Babylonians.*

*The imagery here is wonderful, a mother and her infant. Be careful, of course, the whole nursing at the breast image is not quite as common as it might have been in Isaiah's day and other times and this imagery in a sex saturated climate like ours can really back fire. I heard a horrid sermon on this once. The guy just did not get it that his audience was culturally conditioned by the world in which they lived. It might have worked in Augustine's day, but not ours. My wife thought it was one of the oddest things she had ever heard in her life, and the image of “nursing at the breasts of Jerusalem” which was repeated several times rather prevented her from hearing the rest of it.*

*That said, this is still a very tender image to describe what God is doing to us. I am reminded of a very valuable thing that the Greeks did and which Aquinas clarified for us. The Greeks say:*

*The language of Bible and prayer is affirming*

*The language of theology is negating*

*What they mean by this is that the heart in prayer will call Jesus the true vine as the Scriptures do. But it is the theologian who points out to us that of course Jesus is not a vining plant which is cultivated for the production of grapes and the manufacture of wine. This may seem obvious, but when you have this sort of strong image of God as a mother, you want to remember some of this. The theologian needs to give way to the worship.*

*Two of my favorite theologians Augustine and Aquinas will add the third piece here and speak of the language of analogy. There is a point of comparison that is very helpful for us here. As my mother loved me, God loves. That cannot be seen as the whole picture of God, but I can learn something about God, I can narrow down in my limited understanding to say something about God, but I cannot speak in final and absolute terms.*

*If you preach this like prayer, you run a risk of heresy – You will say God is mother. That is defensible as it is in the text, but contextually it is really problematic.*

*If you preach it like a theologian, you will only tell people what Jesus is not – he's not actually a mother.*

*If, on the other hand, you preach the metaphor, the analogy here, you will preach of God's love. I think that is really where we want to be. God's love is inadequately compared to the most gentle and tender loving acts we encounter in our lives.*

*The preacher who opts to say that Jerusalem is more than just the political place in modern day Israel but also includes all the people of God needs to be bold with this. When we come to worship, God takes us to Jerusalem. When we sing, "This is the Feast" or "Thank the Lord and tell His Praise!" we are the fulfillment of this prophecy by Isaiah. We are Jerusalem. We are rejoicing. Isaiah saw us when we wrote those words.*

*The same thing applies to the image of Jerusalem itself. What is this Jerusalem? Is it not the Church, the people of God? One could preach a pre-convention sermon about this. We will be comforted in Jerusalem. It is hard to see that when the politicking in the synod and the rest of the body of Christ gets to us. It is hard to see this, just as it must have been hard for the exiled people of Isaiah's day to believe that in Jerusalem they would be comforted as an infant is comforted, with utter trust and joy. It never thinks about how high she is holding it, nor does it participate in the worries and concern of the parent. It is just happy to be in her arms, deriving life itself from her.*

*Is this a baptismal text of sorts, especially and infant baptismal text?*



Psalm 66:1-7

Shout for joy to God, all the earth;  
<sup>2</sup> sing the glory of his name;  
give to him glorious praise!  
<sup>3</sup> Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds!  
So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you.  
<sup>4</sup> All the earth worships you  
and sings praises to you;  
they sing praises to your name.” Selah  
<sup>5</sup> Come and see what God has done:  
he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of man.  
<sup>6</sup> He turned the sea into dry land;  
they passed through the river on foot.  
There did we rejoice in him,  
<sup>7</sup> who rules by his might forever,  
whose eyes keep watch on the nations—  
let not the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah

*I would simply point out again that the psalmist seems to have the emotional content of the person who has heard, believed, and seen the rescue which Isaiah describes in the OT reading and which Jesus proclaimed in the Gospel lesson. The preacher might want to use the psalm as a touchstone for his sermon. Would someone who heard my words respond with this psalm?*

Galatians 6:1-10, 14-18

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. <sup>2</sup> Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. <sup>3</sup> For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. <sup>4</sup> But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. <sup>5</sup> For each will have to bear his own load.

<sup>6</sup> Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. <sup>7</sup> Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. <sup>8</sup> For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. <sup>9</sup> And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup> So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

<sup>11</sup> See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. <sup>12</sup> It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. <sup>13</sup> For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your

*flesh.* <sup>14</sup> But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. <sup>15</sup> For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. <sup>16</sup> And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

<sup>17</sup> From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

<sup>18</sup> The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

*This is the final week of the Galatians series we have been exploring for six weeks. Paul's words to the folks in Galatia started out so angry, but notice by this point in the letter his tone has changed somewhat. He is exhorting them and appealing to them as a pastor, a shepherd to his flock.*

*He begins with the neglected center of every Christian fellowship: Forgiveness. What makes a Christian congregation Christian is not that we are better people but that we have a different way of dealing with our sins than the world uses.*

*What does it mean to be "caught" in transgression? This word is in the passive. Who is the catcher? Is it not the enemy who has caught us? I think our generation would hear this as getting caught in our sin, but there was a chance we would have gotten away with it if only we had not gotten caught. But that is not what Paul has in mind. We don't catch them in their sin in a sort of "gotcha!" moment. Paul seems to envision one person grieving that another has fallen into the snare, the trap of the enemy. We need to restore them gently to their rightful place. We too have been caught, and we need to be restored ourselves. The restore word also is interesting. This is what fishermen do to nets, what doctors do to a broken bone. These things are done meticulously and carefully. We all have the Pharisee lurking within us, but Paul's language does not allow that wretch a foothold. We are fixing something broken, something which is important. The torn net, the broken arm are both important things to fix, so is the broken person, the sinner.*

*This text offers the preacher a great opportunity to do a simple teaching sermon on the Christian way to handle conflict. But don't make this into just another free therapy session. This remarkable difference which one sometimes sees in the lives of Christian folk is nothing less than Christ at work, transforming the human being from what he/she was into something else.*

*First of all, the sinner is restored by the faithful in a spirit of gentleness. Notice this is not some pharisaical rectitude, but a genuine grief over the sin and gentle love for the sinner. The way Paul describes this and the way I have seen it work runs like this: The offended person is more grieved for the harm that has come to the sinner than to them. The goal is restoration of relationship, not demonstrating that I am right or you are wrong or exacting some equal payment, but the real goal here is the restored relationship. The litigious society in which we live, with its many rules which are designed to protect us from every doing harm, will not help us see what Paul has in mind.*

*The believer has a genuine temptation here and needs to keep watch. The adversary knows our weakness and realizes that he has a double gain if he messes this process up. But also remember that adversary is powerless before the love of God. His goal will be to divert our attention from that love. We need to proclaim that love and hold it up as a better way.*

*This involves bearing one another's burdens and thus fulfilling the law of Christ. The sinner may have done wrong, but it is incumbent upon the one who is aggrieved to reach out to the sinner. He has a burden of guilt and we need to help him because it is crushing him. We carry that with him, relieving that burden in Christ's love. That means that we cannot simply sit here and note that they have done wrong, we have to go to them, confront them, and love them despite who they are.*

*The law of Christ needs a little explanation in Paul. We might be better translating this as "principle" instead of "law." This is not some new regulation which we must follow but more the simple way of Christ. His first followers called themselves the followers of the "Way." It is the term Jesus uses for himself in John 14:6. As his followers we follow the way, the way is one of servant love for one another.*

*The second point here is a genuinely humility. We cannot think of ourselves as something when we are not. There is no "in" and "out" crowd here. This man's sin has not placed him outside while I am inside. This is the point of Luke 15. We are all outside the kingdom of God by virtue of our sin. The mass murderer and the gossip are simply at different places in the same line of people marching in the wrong direction. They all end up in the same bad place.*

*Nor are there any who are "outside" the kingdom because of their sin. Jesus has died for and forgiven every sin. We cannot make the distinction which our old and broken heart would love to make. We cannot say that we are better than the other guy, or the wretch whose sins have hurt us. We are both in need of and have been given the same rescuing Jesus.*

*We test our own work. Our story is ours to tell. In ancient Rome boasting was not a vice. In fact it was considered a normal and essential part of life. The closest we have to this is the current practice of a resume or curriculum vitae. It is expected that you will note accomplishments and honors and awards that you have received. The prospective employer will never be able to evaluate you properly if you don't. Likewise in the Roman world of competitive politics and business it was expected that you would trumpet your accomplishments. To lie about them was considered bad, but to speak the truth about yourself was really a virtue, an expectation. They called that "boasting" but it did not have the negative connotation which we give that word today. It is our more recent practice of Lutheran piety which says that boasting is wrong of itself. In Paul's day it did not have that negative connotation at all.*

*Our boasting is supposed to be in ourselves, not in the slights which have happened to us. We have all fallen into this trap of blaming others for our situation. It is a form of boasting really, it tells the world that I am OK, it is their fault. Paul is simply telling us not to do that. My "boast"*

*or claim about my current situation is about myself, particularly what Christ has done in me, not what someone else has done to me. The real question is always what am I going to do about this situation, or more truthfully, what will God do through me in this situation. As Paul says a little later in the chapter, his boasting is completely in Christ.*

*Much of the rest of this passage is made up of bits of sage advice. Christians do that once in a while. We have a way to live. It is wise, it is good. We are not made more loveable to God by living this way, but that doesn't mean it doesn't make sense and God's people need to hear this too. It is good to take care of the one who teaches. It is true that what goes around comes back around so we need to exercise care in how we live. We do well in persisting in doing good, especially to those of the household of faith.*

*In verse 8 we need to ask how does one "sow to the Spirit"? What does this look like? The fruits of the spirit on the previous chapter of the letter suggest that this is actually something which is also quite physical. The platonic world which we discussed in the opening essay would have us believe that sowing to the Spirit is somehow non-physical. But we sow to the Spirit when we love with Christ's love, forgive, bear with one another, encourage gently, feed the hungry, serve the weak and vulnerable, love our children and our spouse, etc. Sowing in the Spirit seems to be living the life which God has planted in our Baptism. We have a choice when confronted by the vagaries of the world. We can react with fear, anger, and all the rest of that fleshly list in chapter 5. Or we can bear the fruits of the Spirit. I don't have to be angry or at least lash out in anger. I really don't. I can also be gentle and kind and loving.*

*What do you think he means in the last verses when we speaks of bearing in his body the marks of Christ? Does this refer simply to the wounds of beatings, stonings, shipwrecks, and imprisonments which Paul has suffered? I am inclined to think so, but I am not actually in the majority on that one. For much of Christendom that suggests stigmata, wounds in the hands, feet, and perhaps the side. Franciscans are particularly prone to this. Their founder in the 13<sup>th</sup> century was said to have the wounds of Christ visible in his body. If you want a more contemporary subject, consider Padre Pio. The Wikipedia page is a good spot to start.*

Luke 10:1-20 (Jesus sends out the 72, Satan falls from heaven like lightning and Jesus rejoices!)

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. <sup>2</sup> And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. <sup>3</sup> Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. <sup>4</sup> Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. <sup>5</sup> Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' <sup>6</sup> And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. <sup>7</sup> And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from

house to house.<sup>8</sup> Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you.<sup>9</sup> Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’<sup>10</sup> But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say,<sup>11</sup> ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’<sup>12</sup> I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

<sup>13</sup>“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.<sup>14</sup> But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.<sup>15</sup> And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades.

<sup>16</sup>“The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.”

<sup>17</sup>The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!”<sup>18</sup> And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.<sup>19</sup> Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

<sup>21</sup>*In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.<sup>22</sup> All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”*

*This pericope divides into two neat sections and I think the preacher really wants to pay attention to the second one, but the first has to be part of this. Jesus sends out the 72. He multiplies his ministry this way. That said, this needs to be read with some care. Jesus’ instructions here can be difficult. The whole Franciscan movement, of which Padre Pio mentioned at the end of the Galatians treatment above was part, took shape because Francis opened his bible and read passages like this. Their vow of poverty is laudable in some respects, but I am not sure that it is always and the best way to read this. This is a record of what happened, not always what God would want to happen today. God might indeed be able to use us in very different ways.*

*Is that prior paragraph just my middle class comfort looking for justification for the raise I just received? Perhaps.*

*What does strike me about the mission of the Seventy-Two is that they were sent out with authority to speak a word of peace and then given to expect it to happen.*

*It did not always happen and they had a plan for when the peace did not come upon that house, but they spoke an authoritative kingdom word that had the potential to accomplish something good in the lives of the hearers. If it did, great, if it did not, they moved on.*

*It is really at verse 16 that things get interesting. First of all, when they hear these disciples, they hear Jesus. When they return, the disciples marveled that the word they proclaimed has authority. John 20, Matt 18 and other places tell us that when we speak forgiveness heaven joins in. When we forgive, God forgives. When the person hears our forgiveness and believes it, they are also believing that God has spoken, not just you or me. In this sense, this reading might make the perfect illustration for a sermon on the Epistle reading for today.*

*The 36 pairs head out and come back and are amazed at what happens. They focus on the fact that the demons obey them, which must have been dramatic. But Jesus focuses them on something more subtle but he does not deny the importance of the drama. He too saw Satan fall from heaven and delighted in this. (More on this in just a moment)*

*He really wants them to realize is that their names are written in heaven where Satan now cannot touch them. There is a safe place for them, especially for their names. This is really a baptismal point and it is a good thing for the preacher to notice that our names are given in baptism and written in the book of life. This is the enduring legacy of Baptism, why it is so important to Christians and why it is often what those who hate Christians often seek to extirpate. Even today, a Dalit in India who gets baptized loses out on all the benefits which are due to that caste, they become even lower than the untouchables in Hindu culture.*

*For the Christian that baptismal connection is both good and bad news. There is security here. The name in heaven is out of reach of the evil one. But there is also danger. It appears that the name and not the rest of me outside his grasp. In Revelation 20, John saw that the messenger from heaven had chained Satan for 1000 years. I often use this passage when I am talking about that troublesome verse. I believe that John is referring to the earthly ministry of Jesus when he speaks of a messenger from heaven. Jesus did indeed bind Satan, we saw him drive out a legion of demons not long ago. But the chain which binds Satan is much more akin to the chain of a great and vicious dog than the shackles of a convict. Jesus sees Satan fall to earth, from heaven. My body, my life, my physical being this side of the grave, which is also on earth, is of course within the reach of that chain. But my name is safely in the book of life out of his reach. Like some great dog on a chain, there are things Satan can reach today – my body, my money, my family, my home, but there is something that is out of reach – my name written in the book of life.*

*In terms of proclamation, the preacher has a couple of options here. He can certainly speak of this as a “sending” sort of text in which it speaks of the Lord sending out the workers into the harvest, and today we are sent into this community. He can also address what Jesus says about us and our security and place within the kingdom.*

## **Law and Gospel**

1. This world and too often my own life are filled with strife and conflict. Such conflict tears apart my relationships and often prevents me from forming the friendships that I need and which would make my life sweet. As a result I am often surrounded by people but lonely. There are a thousand contacts in my cell phone but no one I can really talk to. Jesus knows my loneliness and does something about it. He fills my heart with his love and equips me to be a forgiver and reconciler of sinners to himself and myself. Thus he establishes real and lasting and strong relationships. There is never a sinner so great I cannot forgive with his forgiveness!
2. I am afraid to do this. I don't think I can, and I am right. I will mess this up, I will stumble and fall. I have often before and the results are that my past is littered with broken relationships. But Jesus gives me eyes to see anew. He takes me into his gentle and loving arms and loves me unconditionally and then points me toward the good things that he has done through me and encourages me to try again.
3. I am too busy, I protest, to be a person who speaks the word of God to others. I have too much too do. But Jesus does not say that the things I am doing need to stop. Indeed, the workaday world is often the best place for these conversations to take place. He empowers my words and deeds with his love and spirit, so that the most mundane and simple act or word is latent with his love and powerful grace. Through me, he bears the burdens of the other.
4. This is all very good in theory, but in practicality I am a resident of this world. I live in this place and it doesn't want to hear me prattling on about this Jesus. I will lose friends, I will lose benefits, I will be thought strange! But Jesus has spoken another truth of me in Baptism. I am a citizen of heaven. Jerusalem is my home. I am vested in the world's best retirement plan, and my king demands, empowers, and renders beautiful my service to him.

## **Sermon Ideas**

1. Boasting in the Cross (Galatians Sermon Series – That the hearer would boast in the cross of Christ)

The preacher who is considering this sermon will likely want to read Paul's extended treatment of his boast in Christ in II Corinthians 11:16-12:13.

This sermon is preaching toward a goal which has the hearer reframing his or her whole life. To do this the preacher will need to address the problematic frame which the world would put on my life. There are many ways to cast this problematic framing of the human life and the preacher will want to ask what makes the most sense for his people. Here are some suggestions, but we may want to develop others.

- a. I am a victim - The world wants to say that we are victims of other people's errors and misdeeds. I am not to blame for my sins or my problems. My parents, my co-workers, the bad teacher at my school, etc., are really to blame for the train wreck that is my life.
- b. I have rights! – Similar to victimhood, this way of looking at life jealously protects my rights, prioritizing them above the rights of all others. I will be offended if your rights seem to conflict with my self-perceived rights.
- c. Expressionism – This is a form of bad pop-psychology. It is a bad thing to repress my sexual and other urges. So I need to express these things. Such self-care takes a priority over most other things. I am sorry if my expression offended you, but I need to take care of myself. This can be used to justify sexual affairs and a whole host of other really destructive behaviors.
- d. I just want life to be Fair – this is just a form of legalism. This framing of life would see each of us as sinners, yes, but there needs to be some sort of reciprocity/balance here. If I have sinned, I need to find something in you which is just as bad.
- e. I Understand – This is probably a more mature form of fairness. I may not see something that is as bad as you, but we can imagine that in the same sort of situation you would have also done something problematic so we don't need to get upset about what you or I have done.

This is hardly exhaustive and the preacher will not want to attempt to deal with all of these. After all, next week's sermon will need a theme too! But as Paul recasts the Christian life today he contradicts another way of looking at life and human relationships.

The preacher will then want to speak of the other life to which Paul is calling us, a life which is cast in the light of the cross of Christ. To each of these Paul has boast in the Cross of Christ. Paul had many things which could have led him to say that he was a victim. Just read the passage in II Corinthians 11 mentioned above. Paul could have framed his life as one of terrible victimhood. But he does not. He sees his suffering as a privilege. It connects him to Christ's suffering (Colossians 1:24-29).

Paul eschews his rights as an apostle in many respects and calls on them to honor him for other reasons. He acknowledges his interior life but does not suggest that he embrace its problematic life (Romans 7). Paul does not see fairness as the way of life – Romans 5 declares that while we were enemies of God, he died for us. Paul does not deny understanding, but he does not empower it to be the way of his life. He preaches a deep mystery which transcends his understanding and that frees him from the need to understand sinfulness. It might even free him from the need to understand politicians and Synodical conventions.



The preacher will want to carefully walk the congregant through some places in life in which the application of the Cross of Christ principle makes a difference. In verses 6 and following Paul speaks of a life which is led with generosity and charity. It is a life which does not grow weary of doing good things. How could it, its boast is in the one who gave all, even life itself, for me. I may be weary, my body may ache, my eyes may need to close in sleep, but my weariness is not a weariness of doing the good to which God has called me. Tomorrow when I rise again, I will do more good. Freed from the burden of my sins, from the intellectual framework of rights and fairness and the destructive drive of pop psychology I can simply do good.

2. Sustained and Sent (That the hearer, guided by the Spirit, would discern whether he/she is being sent or sustained today.)

Jesus today in the Gospel lesson includes his disciples and us in the central work of the Kingdom of heaven. He sends us out with the very word of God. The one who hears us hears the one who sent us, and that is God! That reality can and should excite us. After all, we are part of something really important, and it is a wonder that God would include even me in such a task which is so central to the very Kingdom of God.

And yet, preach a sermon about sending, about evangelism and eyes will roll and people will avert their eyes lest they make contact with the preacher. Doesn't he know we are busy, doesn't he know we are terrified at the very thought of talking about this stuff with other folks? Doesn't he get it that I am no good at this?

Yes, he does get it, and he does know all those things, and he sends. But sending is not all that he does. He also nurtures. Jesus has taught these men for some time before he sends them off. He has also given them amazing stories to tell and authorized them with potent words and instructions. He nurtured much before he ever sent.

There is a bit of discernment required here. The sustaining work is essential to the equipping of a person who can be sent. On the other hand, sustenance without the goal of being sent is empty of meaning. They are both part of this equation. We have been saved by God, but not like all the crud I find in my basement which I have been saving and now wonder what it is for. We have been saved purposefully, because Jesus wants us to be a witness to his work.

In order to be that sendable person we have to see the work of Jesus for us, we need the sustenance of God's word and work in our lives. Jesus does not send us without a story to tell or a word to speak. If you don't have it, don't go, at least not yet. He is not sending you. But on the other hand, if you have been in these pews for some time and don't have such a word to speak, we really have to ask a question or two about your sustenance.

Sustenance can become very self-serving, we can delight in God's word, we can love the fellowship, and we can be devoted to our congregation and miss the big picture entirely. Jesus created this congregation because the people of this community are in darkness and desperately need what you have every Sunday in this place. This sustenance, you see, is not just for your enjoyment, it is for your equipment.

Today Jesus speaks of your security and the authority with which you speak. He sustains and nourishes us by describing us, so that we may be sent out into this world. He does not sugar coat the

3. In a Spirit of Gentleness (Galatians 6 That the hearer would deliberately serve the community of faith through the forgiveness of others.)

This sermon simply endeavors to call the hearer to one of the central truths/teachings of the Christian faith but also would empower the Christian life which flows out of that teaching. We may want also to point to the Disciples returning in Joy. Jesus had sent them out with a clear command, they did it, and it worked. That is a little of what we have in mind today. This sermon succeeds when people walk out the door strategizing and preparing to forgive someone in gentleness this week.

Paul exhorts us to deal with the sinner gently. Free from the need to keep the law, we now, by the grace of Christ, are free and able to keep the law. Paul's recipe for such gentle treatment includes some obvious and essential virtues which need to be cultivated and nurtured in any Christian community. But this is not our doing, it is really Christ alive and at work in our midst. When we forgive, we can almost take a step back and be amazed that Jesus has worked here, we have gotten to see him in this moment. We as human beings are so quick to take credit for His work.

Virtue #1 Humility - all of us are in the same boat here, cut off from God by our sinfulness. All of us have been caught in sin, trapped in the snares of our evil foe. We all have needed and received the same gift from God, Jesus. There is no room for arrogance or haughtiness in here, and no room for moral superiority. When we confront the sinner, it is never as someone who has not stumbled, but as one beggar telling another beggar where to find a hot meal. I am only able to confront your sin because I know that my own sin, probably greater than yours, is forgiven in Christ and I want to do the same to you. Paul speaks of bearing burdens. This is the language of the servant. Burden bearing is something that a slave or a servant does. Bent in service is the posture of the Christian. The tree which is bent lowest is the one which is bearing the most fruit.

Virtue #2 Love of the sinner - We not only do this out of the humility which is born of a brutal self-honesty about our own sinfulness, but we are driven to do this because we love the person. There is no room again in this for the desire to see him or her squirm, or for some righteous sense of justice. Paul is a great model here. He was angry at the beginning

of this letter, but he will not leave them in that anger. He has come a long way from that. We are not balancing scales here or making them pay. We love that person. This is the Law/Rule/Kingdom of Christ of which Paul speaks at the end of this passage as well. This is the kingdom which the disciples proclaimed in the Gospel reading.

Now, the real message in all this is going to come to us a little later. After you describe this, the truth is that you will lead them to realize that they cannot do this. It is simply beyond us, and perhaps we ought to just give up on it, as many have done. But the miracle of Jesus working today is that we are not called upon to create this love or this humility, but such love and humility were given to us in our baptism and sustained regularly in the work of Christ in our life. He imprints his own very nature and character upon us. These virtues which are so lacking in us are found in abundance in him and through the relationship of the faith which Jesus has created in us he gives them to us and causes them to flourish. Circumcision and uncircumcision don't really matter anymore. It is the cross of Christ which matters, he loves us.

The relationship in which sinners are forgiven is not the fruit of our willpower or our goodness, but his good and gracious will working itself out in our lives. Here the fruitfulness metaphor he used last week might be helpful. The apple tree just does the fruit, it doesn't really think about it. But if we do not believe him, if we do not act on his promise, we will be like an opaque pitcher filled with water. It is there, but who would know until you pour it out. We have been filled, it is time to pour it out, it is time to forgive today. He has put this in there for us. He has given us love enough. *This is the part of the sermon which we will preach a faith challenge. This is something to believe.*

You reap what you sow. There is a real blessing in this. If we are forgiving, loving, that will rebound to us. God will never let that pitcher be empty. This sort of forgiving life is also a tremendous blessing to us. It is not that we get forgiveness by doing this, I already have that in abundance. I am not more God's child because I love someone, but there is a sweetness and goodness to life which forgives and which in turn experiences that forgiveness from others in the community of faith. Paul is pointing his and our community to a healthy and good thing. Remember, they were in some pretty serious problems at the beginning of this letter, remember how angry he was. Is he here gently restoring the transgressors, having encountered them caught in transgression?

4. Your heart will still rejoice, your bones will flourish, You will see God's hand (OT - That the hearer would hope in God, especially as God is great at turning around otherwise dismal situations, the very sort of thing we might see in the Church today.)

The Babylonians had hammered the poor citizens of Jerusalem. They thought all was lost. They could not see how this could be revived. But in a strange and distant land God restored them, helped them, and healed them. Their grandchildren did return to that city

of Jerusalem, but more importantly, they flourished as a people because God was with them.

We often find that we look about our church and see that it is declining or even going away. But God has not left his Church, but we also must see that he does not tie himself to our buildings, or our constitutions any more than he did to the city of Jerusalem. He ties himself to his people. He loves them, and promises them that he has good things in mind for them.

I don't always know what that means. It is likely that the LCMS will see many parishes dissolve in the next ten years, lose the ability to sustain a pastoral call and thus be forced to merge or otherwise configure their ministry. It may well be that the parish to which you preach is facing those sorts of challenges. I can name several in my city who are. It might happen that your parish will eventually stop being an entity recognized by the state as a charitable 501c3 entity, in other words the parish will dissolve, but God will not dissolve the relationships which he established in baptism, nor will he abandon his people. He loves them. They will flourish, they will see his righteousness. Nothing will separate us from the love of God. (Romans 8:28ff)

There is much to weep about in all this, but there is also much to hope for in all this. The children of Israel grieved over their fallen city. It is the nature of the way God made us. We will grieve over this. But that is a good thing, and we need to grieve. But, as Paul also said in I Thessalonians, we will not grieve like others, but we will grieve in hope. His kingdom does come, his will is done.