

Sermon 1607

Matthew 10.24-33

July 9, 2017

Old photographs can be unsettling. Earlier this summer my sister gave Karen and me the job of going through a travelling trunk, a steamer trunk. It was big 3 feet by 2 feet by a foot and a half, full of old pictures to see if we wanted any. I came across some of Gale Peterson. He was my English teacher (10th and 12th grade). I've still got those poems etched in my memory. So do a lot of other of his students. At a funeral sermon I recently did in La Crosse I mentioned him and everybody shook their heads in agreement. Gale Peterson had started his studies to go into the preaching ministry, but got so sick in college that he couldn't go on to Seminary. He became a high school teacher, my high school teacher. He was among the first in Wisconsin to get a kidney transplant. Oh, and he also taught Latin. He was my friend.

So when I decided (way late) I wanted to become a minister, he was the first to know. You could knock him over with a feather, he was so surprised. I won't say why. But I needed two more years of Latin so I would still get through college in four years. He tutored me six out of seven days that summer and I got the highest Latin entry score Northwestern College ever recorded.

When other faculty members from my high school asked me why I was going to become a preacher, I said I was Gale Peterson's replacement. I was proud of him and I guess he was proud of me. That picture brought back good memories. I think I've been a good replacement for the ministry he would have carried out, had he not been so sick. I know what it is like to look up to someone. I know what it is like to carry on their work. But you do, too, because there is one we all love and want to follow.

Our Pride and Glory

1. Our Teacher.
2. What he taught.

“A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household! Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven (24-25, 32-33).”

Our pride and glory is our Teacher, Jesus. It is one thing to jump on the bandwagon, another thing to cherish someone as your pride and glory. Whoever wins the Super Bowl next February will see an upsurge in the sales of their jerseys. Everybody will want to be a Minnesota Viking fan! We call it trendy. In. Fashionable. If everybody is doing it, it must be great.

Well, what's everybody doing? Pretty much forgetting about God. Pretty much watering down his commands and teachings. Jesus becomes nothing but a prophet of love and healing. Follow his example to make this world a better place, but don't

take it too far. God would certainly want us all to be happy and how in the world can we be happy if we're not doing what our sinful human nature wants? And what does that sinful human nature want? It wants to judge and condemn. It wants to put down. I offer up Exhibit A, the only piece of evidence necessary. The internet. Vile twitters, obscene Instagrams, self-satisfied Facebook postings, comments that would make high school varsity players, sitting around the locker room after a shower, blush. And if you haven't made any of those nasty comments, you and I have probably thought them, because jumping to judgmental conclusions is trending. That's jumping on the bandwagon.

Your pride and glory is a different thing. You stick with your pride and glory even through the lean years. The Vikings went 3-11 in 1960, their first season as a team. It got even worse the next year, 2-11-1. You and I stick with Jesus even though the world thinks Jesus is having yet another 2-11-1 season.

We are going to carry the same reputation as our Teacher. If the world calls the Teacher Beelzebub, a derogatory name for the devil, the Lord of the Flies, the Lord of the garbage dump, it will not be nice to his students. And so it is. We don't make much of it. We don't run a Christian cable news outlet intent on riling people up as we sit back on our haunches and complain how we're being badly treated. No, we just keep a low profile, move on and do our business. But we recognize the stigma of being Christians who want to lead their lives according to the Bible. Friendships are lost. Eyes roll our way when we get in a conversation about how the world began. People become patronizing as if we were a class of people with such low IQs we need to be looked after.

They said Jesus was crazy. They said Jesus was a cheat. They said he did his miracles because he was in league with the devil. And when they could not come up with any worse names to mock him, they nailed him to the cross and they watched him die while they told jokes at his expense. They crucified the Word of Life to shut him up. You and I are his replacements to spread that life-giving word.

So, when the world speaks all kind of evil against you, rejoice! That's what they did to Jesus. That's what they always do to the people of God. It shows we belong to Jesus and by these very sufferings, we are acknowledging him before the world. Far from being fair weather Christians, the faith the Holy Spirit has given us moves us to stand by Jesus through thick and thin. Our teacher, Jesus, is our pride and glory.

Our pride and glory is also what he taught. You can't divorce the person from the message. You can't divorce Jesus from the Gospel.

“So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the

One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows (26-31)."

Jesus is talking about the Gospel here. And this is the Gospel. For the sake of his one and only Son, Jesus Christ, God has forgiven you and me and all people. By faith in that promised forgiveness we will live forever in heaven.

Now when would Jesus have kept that a secret? He always talked openly about God's forgiveness. There was the parable of the Prodigal Son, the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, the Pharisee and the tax collector praying in the Temple and the tax collector being forgiven because he said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner," while the Pharisee was only bragging himself up to God. But the part of Jesus' message, the part of the Gospel, that Jesus kept secret while he walked on this earth was that he was the Messiah, the glorious and almighty Son of God. When he comes down from the Mount of Transfiguration, having given Peter, James and John a glimpse of his heavenly glory, he tells them not to reveal any of this until he would rise from the dead. In the same way, when Peter, on behalf of the Twelve, confesses, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16.16)," he warns them not to tell anyone he is the Christ.

But after his resurrection, there would be no need to keep Jesus' person a secret. On Pentecost Peter would proclaim, "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2.36)." The Apostles would proclaim Jesus as Christ so often that Christ would almost become his second name, Jesus Christ, leading to no small confusion among our preschoolers why it isn't Mary Christ and Joseph Christ! Our pride and glory is the message that, for the sake of Jesus the Christ, the promised Savior, we have forgiveness of sins and deliverance from death and the devil.

I am never shy in relaying instructions that Gale Peterson imparted to me. Just the other day I told someone they should read Langston Hughes' poem, *Harlem*, about the risk of raising dreams only to have them deferred. I see the quibbling threads of learned theologians and I think of *Naming of Parts*. What is the ministry except the caring for souls? What is the instruction of Jesus we are so proud to pass on?

The Gospel in its many forms and applications.

Someone you know experiences a loss. They talk to you about it. They obviously loved that person and they miss them terribly. "Were they a Christian?" you ask. "Yes," they reply. "Then they are in heaven having the best time ever and you will see them again. Just keep believing." And then they say something like, "I hope they are in heaven." And you look them squarely in the eye and assert, "They are in heaven because Jesus was good enough to get them into heaven."

That's the Gospel.

Or this one:

A person has been pretty bad. Quite bad, even by worldly standards. Lots of people got hurt because of this one. But they repented and received forgiveness. Then in talking it over with you, they let slip that they don't feel like they are forgiven and that's why they keep doing these stupid things, basically to make themselves suffer. "Do you believe Jesus suffered on the cross to pay for all sins?" you ask them. "Yes, sure. That's why he died." "Then if his suffering was enough for God, why isn't his suffering enough for you? You are acting like Jesus didn't do enough to take away the guilt of your sin."

That's the Gospel.

If we are proud of someone, but ashamed of their teaching, we act like they were deaf and mute all their life and never said anything recorded, written or remembered. That's not the case with our Jesus, is it? His words are in our hearts and on our lips. This is

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We may need old pictures in the trunk to remember what that high school friend looked like. We may need old pictures in the trunk to sort out the family tree, lining up the second cousins with the right set of parents. But we don't need an old picture to bring back memories of our pride and glory. Jesus has told us he is with us always, even to the ends of the world. He is with us. His words are on our lips. We tell others the message that will never put believers to shame.