

Lent 5 – March 18, 2018

Text: Matt. 10:35-45

Theme: Theology of the Cross

You may have heard of the theology of glory. This is when you do the right things for the wrong reason. This is when you believe that doing good things should earn you an easier life, more respect or a higher position. In other words, your works are primarily designed to accomplish something for yourself, not God or others. I describe the theology of glory as when we make our faith all about us. It is an easy trap into which we fall because it is so easy to think that we deserve some kind of reward for the works we do. It is an insidious trap of which we are often unaware until we have fallen into it and the trap has sprung shut and clamped down upon us.

The theology of the cross, on the other hand, is all about Jesus and what he did by dying on the cross. Only his death on the cross and the complete forgiveness of our sins allows us to do any of the good that we do. Chief among any works we do is bearing our own crosses for the glory of God and the benefit of others. It's not something we design. It is just something faith does. An apple tree does not plan to bear apples or boast about growing apples. That is just what an apple tree does. A Spirit filled Christian does not have to design works to be good, nor does he boast in his good works for that is just the supernatural result of faith in Christ. Whatever good works we do is not us doing them but the Holy Spirit working through the faith he has created in us. We are the clay.

He is the potter. It is his covenant working through us. God said through the prophet Jeremiah,

“And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” God said that, not us. God did that, not us.

In Holy Baptism, the Holy Spirit came to dwell within us as his temple. Because he dwells within us, we do good works. In our Gospel for today, we see James and John pursuing a theology of glory. One can hardly blame them. Who among us, if we got to walk and talk with Jesus on earth would not like to use our earthly position to secure an eternal position on his right or left in heaven? It seems obvious to any of us who have even a little ambition. Why not leverage the works you are doing by following Jesus on earth to get a leg up over everyone else in heaven?

Then we see the other disciples responding to James and John with a like theology of glory. They became indignant because who were James and John to try and get front row seats in heaven? What had they done to deserve such merit? And that’s the point. What had they done? Nothing. They had done nothing to merit anything because no matter how they tried, they were still corrupted by sin. If you are as Holy as you possibly can be, you are still fully corrupted by original sin. As long as we

focus on what we have done, we will be swimming in the pool of the theology of glory.

We are not called to be served and frankly, as people of faith, being served in any capacity makes us a little nervous. We are the servants not the ones served. I strive to preach well. I have worked on my craft for over 40 years, striving to be excellent at public speaking and then formally studying communication, psychology and theology in order to improve my God given ability. But every time I preach, I begin with a prayer of confession because I know that as hard as I have worked, I have not done enough. I should have spent more time with the original language of the text. I should have practiced the delivery more. I should have paid closer attention to the context of the text. I should have thought more carefully about the rhythm of my language. So I conclude my prayer asking the Holy Spirit to take what I have done and use it for his glory, and he does. That's the theology of the cross. He takes my offering and shapes it, hones it and focusses it where it needs to be.

We know that no matter how much we have done, it is never sufficient and our sufficiency is only found in Christ. Christ can take all of our good works and magnify them through the cross so that they not only accomplish his will but glorify God. That is what Luther tried so hard to explain to the people of his day. It does not matter whether you are a priest, a housekeeper or a banker. Nothing you do on your own will be

acceptable. But by the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in you, all that you do will be perfected.

So if you are a volunteer, or a business owner or a musician know that the Holy Spirit can and will take what you do and glorify it. God has claimed you as his people and sent the Holy Spirit to dwell within you. How can you be anything less than stellar? The power of God shines through you! Never think that what you do for God's glory is anything less than magnificent regardless of how great or how small it is by worldly standards.

You have been baptized by the baptism with which Jesus was baptized. You are invited each week to drink from the cup from which Jesus drank. Whatever you do, you do with him abiding in you. Can you pray for others? Then do so! Can you give an offering? Then give it! Can you show love for another person? Then do it! These are amazing works that the Holy Spirit will bless 30, 60 or a hundredfold. These are the things that change peoples' lives. These are the things through which the Holy Spirit will win souls for the kingdom of God.