

February 8, 2009  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

**By All Means, Share the Good News!**

Pastor Michael Ewart  
Text: 1 Corinthians 9:16-23

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Have you ever wanted something so bad, you'd just about do anything for it? I'm sure you've had the feeling more than once. When kids see a certain toy or new video game they really want, they'll do just about anything to get it. Or maybe you've gotten the new car bug. You see new model of a certain car, and you just have to have it, no matter what. Or you're saving for your first house, and you want your own house so bad, you save half your paycheck for a long time to save up enough for the down payment. Or maybe it's the newest tech gadget. As the saying goes, you'd give an arm and a leg for the toy, the car, the house, or tech gadget whatever you've set your heart on. And even if it means being inconvenienced for a while so you can get it, you're willing to do that too.

Well, there is something much more meaningful than any material thing you may have set your heart on. After all, every last one of those things I mentioned will eventually wear out, lose value, be damaged, or you'll just plain lose interest in it. But one thing that will never be lost and will never change will be the love our God has for us. His promises, his forgiveness, his acceptance, and his eternal inheritance... these all remain forever. They are precious. They are the things that give you hope, aren't they?

Now here's the thing, by God's grace these amazing promises are in your possession. You can share them or you can hide them. In our Old Testament lesson today in Job 7, we heard Job speaking in his misery. He lamented about man's hard service on earth, the pain he must suffer and how quickly life passes. Job was a man in need of hope and comfort. Unfortunately, he didn't have a wife or friends to bring him that word of comfort.

Now think about the Gospel lesson for today. Jesus did bring hope and comfort to those suffering and in distress, didn't he? He healed Peter's sick mother-in-law and others who were sick. He drove out demons. But his primary purpose in coming was to preach. He came to teach people to horrors of living in sin, and the amazing blessing of having God's forgiveness. He encouraged the weary and the burdened to come to him. He promised them true rest. He encouraged those who were troubled to trust in him and they would not perish but have everlasting life.

Friends, all around you are people who are suffering and stressed out and struggling. You are in possession of the message that will make them all better. You have what they need: the saving, comforting, hope-giving gospel message that Jesus Christ freely and fully forgives our sins and makes us dearly loved children of God.

Will you bring God's hope to those who are struggling? Listen to the sermon text in which God encourages us: "*By all means, share the good news!*" Even if it costs you an arm and a leg. Even if you have to wear uncomfortable shoes. And I'll explain what I mean by that in a minute.

*1 Cor 9:16-23 Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it. Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law*

*but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.*

How is that Paul became totally dedicated to preaching the gospel by all possible means? It can all be traced back to the time Paul came to know Jesus Christ as his Savior from sin. Up until that time, Paul had been one of the top persecutors of Christianity. He thought he was doing God a favor when he put Christians in jail, and beat them and had them killed. But all that changed on a road to Damascus when Jesus appeared to him. From that time on he knew and believed in Jesus as the world's Savior from sin and as his own Savior from sin. That faith affected the course of his life. It gave him a whole new purpose for life. He completely realigned his life with God's will and God's purposes. Paul's new goal in life was share the message of Christ with others and to give glory to God in all he did.

Now let me tell you how you can have the same enthusiasm and commitment to sharing Christ as Paul. First of all, recognize the fact that you are a sinner. Paul certainly was aware of that. He even called himself the chief of sinners. So recognize you have offended the almighty, holy and just God by your actions, your inactions, your thoughts, your words, and even because of the way you are by nature. You have failed to be what God wants you to be. And realize that God has said that what we earn for our sins is eternal death. Now if you're like most people, a bunch of "Yeah, but...s" just came to your mind. "Yeah, but I'm not as bad as..." "Yeah, but I'm trying." "Yeah, but God will overlook my shortcomings." All of these "Yeah, but's" are wrong! They are absolutely false. None of them coincides with what Scriptures tell us. Realize the fact that on our own we are lost, hopeless sinners and there is not a thing **WE** can do about it.

But there is something God has done about it. God couldn't overlook our sins, because that wouldn't be just or right. So he had to devise a way to have them paid for and atoned for. God's plan was to send his Son Jesus to take on human form. Jesus lived the kind of life we only wish we could live. He always pleased God with his actions and his thoughts and his words. And his very nature was holy and perfect. Jesus, through his life, earned for himself eternal life. Instead, you know what happened. Jesus became sinful -- not with his own sins, but with your sins and mine. He took them all upon his shoulders. And then he was punished severely for the sins of the world. He suffered separation from the heavenly Father, and he suffered the wages of sin -- death. As a result he paid the full price for all sin. God showed the debt of every last sin was paid in full by raising Jesus to life. So we can join Paul in praising God that he has forgiven our debt of sin, and has given us the righteousness of Christ.

Do you see why Paul was so eager to spread the Good News about Christ? It became his number one goal in life to let others know the incredible truth he knew. And the Gospel has the same effect on us. The result of knowing well God's grace for sinners, is that we will willingly give up rights and freedoms and comforts as well as time and our possessions... all for the sake of spreading the gospel.

And look at Paul's thinking! He felt he had no choice about preaching the gospel. Whether he did it willingly or not, he had to preach the gospel. God had given him a responsibility to tell the world about the saving work of Jesus Christ. However, preaching it willingly was what gave him great pleasure. He showed his willingness and eagerness to spread the Word by willingly giving up anything that may have hindered the Word.

Now, one thing Paul gave up was his right to be paid. Paul made it perfectly clear that ministers of the gospel should be supported by those whom they serve. It's how they feed their family. It is their full time work. But Paul saw that in his circumstance, receiving payment for his work could potentially hinder the gospel's spread. You can imagine how easy it would be for rumors to spread how Paul was getting rich collecting money from so many different

congregations. Rather than risk a potential barrier to the gospel, Paul happily gives up his right to make a living as an evangelist.

Are you willing to give some things up for the spread of the gospel? Would you give an arm and a leg to see to it that there are no hindrances in your life to the proclamation of the Good News about Jesus? Think about possible hindrances to the gospel in your life.

- In the work place, do your business dealings, or sales techniques, or the way you treat your co-workers encourage those around you to find out what makes you different? Or do some of your actions hinder the spread of the Gospel?
- Does your speech and conversation reflect the love of God, or are you hindering the gospel by cursing, foul language, gossip, slander?
- When you skip church on a weekend, or rarely open up your Bible to read it, are your friends, family and neighbors perhaps less inclined to want to hear the gospel? If they perceive it's not a priority for you, can we expect them to want to give the message serious attention?
- You have the freedom to your own opinion, as long as it doesn't conflict with Scripture. And in some circumstances, you may be absolutely correct in a matter, but could you perhaps surrender an argument willingly if it meant removing a hindrance to the Gospel?

As redeemed children of God, our Lord has given us complete freedom. Yet out of love for others and out of love for Lord, there may be times we willingly give up certain freedoms and inconvenience ourselves for the good of the Kingdom.

And the same could be said of our time, talents and treasures. God doesn't require us to spend a set amount of time at church. He doesn't require us to give a set amount of our income to the church. And he doesn't require us to serve on a board and committee. When we give sacrificially for something, we say we give an arm and a leg. Isn't our God worthy of receiving our whole bodies... our whole effort and being? *'Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.'* Romans 12:1.

In our lesson Paul also was showing the Corinthians how he was willing to put himself out and take whatever measures were necessary to bring some to faith. Paul was willing to walk in someone else's shoes, even if they were uncomfortable. He says, *"Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible."* In other words, Paul was willing to adapt to the needs of others. And he lists some of the types of people he adapted to.

*"To the Jews I became like a Jew to win the Jews."* When Paul came to a new town, he didn't attempt to call together a meeting of the Jews in the town square. Instead, he went to the synagogue, where he knew they would be assembled anyway. It might not have been the ideal place to go, or the most convenient, but that's where the people would listen to him. And he didn't tell them their customs and traditions were ridiculous, he adapted to the culture in order to preach about Christ. He inconvenienced himself out of love and concern for the souls of others.

*To those under the law*, Paul became as one *under law*. Some people thought the Old Testament rules and regulations had to be kept to make it to heaven. So when Paul ministered to them, he kept their rules and regulation so as not to offend them. To those without the law, Paul became like one without the law; he didn't observe certain rules and regulations in their presence, because that would have turned them off. In both circumstances, God hadn't commanded or forbidden such things, so put himself in their shoes, and looked at things from their perspective, so that he might see a way to share the good news about how Christ had died on the cross for their sins.

*To the weak, Paul became weak*. This probably referred to those who had heard something of

Christianity, but were still weak and held some superstitions. Again, Paul became like them so he could gently win them over to the true way. He didn't want to offend anyone, but instead, looked for every possible way to get the news about Christ out.

Now listen to the reason Paul gave for doing this: *"I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means, I might save some."* Note he doesn't say "that I might save all." Or "most", or even "many." Paul knew some would reject the Gospel. He knew he wouldn't have incredible results all the time. But he goes to these extreme measures so that by every human way possible the Gospel might be proclaimed clearly, and as a result, **some** might be saved. Imagine the joy and peace Paul must have received from the Gospel that he would go to such measures, even inconveniencing himself and putting aside his own personal likes and preferences, all in the hopes that **some** might be saved.

May we also have the same desire to preach the Gospel by all possible means. And by all possible means, I'm not advocating the shove it in your face form of witnessing. I'm sure you've all experienced that. I had a man come up to me in a parking lot once and out of the blue ask me, "Are you saved?" That's not what Paul had in mind by "all possible means." Doing something like that doesn't show love and concern for people. *"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil."* 1 Peter 3:15-17

Instead, model your witnessing after Paul's. First of all, find common ground with someone. Establish a bond. Try to be a friend. Walk in that person's shoes, even if they are a little uncomfortable. That's something that doesn't come easy to us. I think sometimes we're so focused on our right teachings and right faith that we forget about love. So when a religious discussion comes up at the office, or wherever, isn't the tendency to argue about different teachings, like abortion, or married priests, or women pastors? But instead of arguing, try walking in their shoes. I'm not saying agree with them, or even give them that impression, but usually, it's pretty easy to understand how people can believe those kinds of things. And really, any belief that a person has which is different from God's will, is just a symptom of a bigger problem. It's just what happens when someone isn't in a right relationship with God.

Instead of arguing, look for an opportunity to share Christ. Try to steer all conversations and potential arguments to an opportunity to witness to the fact that Jesus Christ lived a perfect life in your place, and suffered and died on the cross for your sins. By believing in him we have eternal life. Isn't that the most important issue you want to address? Once a person knows his standing with God through faith in Christ, then the other false beliefs can be addressed.

Now, why should we go to such measures? Why put ourselves out and make sacrifices? Listen to Paul's reason. *"I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings."* And that's what it all comes back to. Paul didn't preach for personal gain or his own benefit. He preached the Gospel to become a fellow partaker in its blessings. He experienced its joys and the peace it imparts as it is shared with others.

Friends, there are so many people suffering, stressed out and anxious. They're hurting, and you possess the cure. Have compassion on them. Share what you know about Jesus. Even if it costs an arm and a leg, and even if it means wearing uncomfortable shoes. In doing so, you also share in the blessings of the gospel, both now and in eternity. Amen.