

18th Sunday after Pentecost

10/4/20

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Have you obtained the prize?

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

The text is Philippians 3:14a

¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize (Phi 3:14 ESV)

What does Paul mean by pressing toward the goal for the prize? The question for this sermon is if you are a Christian have you not already received the prize? Or, as a Christian who believes that you are not saved by works, how can you possibly be pressing toward a prize. Here are English synonyms for the word prize:

- award, reward, premium.
- trophy, cup, medal, crown.
- honour, accolade, **crown**, purse, winnings, sweepstake.

You see that the word prize means that you get it because of some work which you have done to receive the award, reward, trophy and so forth. In fact, the Greek word for prize (barbion) is understood as an award to the victor in the games or as a metaphor for the heavenly reward for Christian character.

In my opinion that definition for the Greek word is an error because it gives the impression that the prize is obtained because of something you have done in your life here on earth. Another way of saying that is to contend that you have merited or earned this prize because of what you have done physically in the flesh. This leads to your confidence that the work you have done in the flesh results in your deserving the prize at the end of the race. However, try and compare your works of the flesh with those of the apostle Paul:

If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more:

⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;

⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.
(Phi 3:4-6 ESV)

EXPLAIN THOSE PHRASES.

But then Paul experienced a meeting with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus which led to a change in his thinking.

⁷ *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.*

⁸ *Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ*

⁹ *and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith-- (Phi 3:7-9 ESV)*

What Paul writes to the Philippians is the essence of the Christian faith. While God reveals that no one goes to heaven unless they are considered as righteous by God Himself, it is clear that nothing we do in the flesh is sufficiently righteous to offset our sins. So how are we considered by God as righteous enough to enter into heaven?

Paul said it: *, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.* Notice, it is not dependent on works but on faith. And that faith is not an operation we invent from the flesh but is that which the Holy Spirit gives us as a gift either by hearing the Word of God or being baptized.

So if we are already righteous in God's sight because of our faith; that is, trust in the promises of the Gospel, what pray tell is the prize that we press on toward? It has to be something we do not yet have even though we have the blessings of the forgiveness of sins, the robe of righteousness and a peace and comfort as we journey through the sufferings of life. The prize which we will soon have is verse 10 & 11:

¹⁰ *that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,*

¹¹ *that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*
(Phi 3:10-11 ESV) Even the apostle Paul admits:

¹² *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.*

¹³ *Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,*

¹⁴ *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*
(Phi 3:12-14 ESV)

Why does that not mean that we are earning the prize by the race we run. During the disruption of worship services this summer I sent the congregation a sermon on the website, conducted a Wednesday night phone Bible study and put up a video. You may recall the video of the runner in a race whose leg went lame as all the rest of the runners ran by him.

However, a man came running up to him from the grandstands, put his arms around him and helped him to hobble to the end of the race. It was his father. Yes, he came in last but got a bigger prize of applause from the crowd than the runner who had come in first.

That's what Paul is talking about. You and I are that lost sheep that Jesus picks up and carries home. You also on your last day from this vale of tears will receive the final prize of the resurrection from the dead not only to be again with our loved ones who have gone before us to heaven, but we will always be with Jesus for an eternity of bliss and joy. Amen.

And may the peace of God that passes all understanding keep.....

Prayer of the Church 17th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 21A) 27 Sept 2020

Make us to know Your ways, O Lord, that we may walk in the path of salvation made known in Your Word. Hear our complaints and quiet them by Your merciful deliverance, that we may respond with trust and thanksgiving. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Encourage us, O Lord, by Your Holy Spirit, that we may not lose heart but, being of one mind and one will, may serve You with gladness, doing the works of Your Kingdom and speaking Your Word of witness throughout the world. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Help us, O Lord, to hold fast to Your Word and bless us with a faithful full time pastor who will preach and teach Your eternal Gospel, that we may rejoice in doing Your will. Guide those considering church-work vocations, and bless them as they are formed for Your service. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Show us Your compassion, O Lord, and in Your mercy grant healing, comfort and peace to all those who suffer. Deliver them from all their afflictions, pain, sorrow and fear. We especially pray for _____ and all those we name in our hearts before You. [*Brief silence*] Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Guide us, O Lord, that with all our hearts, minds, bodies and resources we may serve You. Give special blessing to the Lutheran Women's Missionary League and to the many ways they bring the good news of Your salvation and the works of Your love across our nation and world. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

*Unite us, O Lord, that we may be of one mind and one will in doctrine, witness and service. Bless us as we come at Your bidding to receive the body and blood of Your Son at His table. Grant that what we receive in this Holy Communion we may keep in holy hearts and holy lives. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.***

Grant to us all good things needful for this body and life and profitable for our salvation, and keep from us all things harmful, that sustained in time of want and guarded in time of prosperity, we may endure to the day of our Lord's coming and be judged worthy of eternal life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forevermore. **Amen.**