

The Third Sunday in Lent

March 4, 2018

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

*"Jesus is our Only Ground for Boasting"*

Tonight the Academy Awards will be handed out to honor the achievements of those who work in the film industry. This year there is something more than just usual hype and excitement about over the celebrities that will attend the event. Many if not all of the women who attend the Awards will dress in black as a show of solidarity, a unified protest against the sexual harassment and abuse that has so long been an accepted part of the business of Hollywood. It is accepted no more, not just in Hollywood but in everywhere. Coaches, doctors, politicians, and rock musicians are feeling the heat of judgment for their selfish abuse of authority and privilege and rightly so.

I do however have two concerns with the "#METOO" movement. It does not go far enough in calling a sin a sin, nor does it offer those whose sins are called out anything more than complete condemnation. These days there is an accepted assumption that any form of sexual expression is good just so long as both parties are willing. Among the guests of tonight's Awards there will be people who consensually engage in masochistic sexual behavior like that glorified in the "Fifty Shades of Gray" movie series. Others will be attending the ceremony with their lovers, rather than their spouses. Before God, these people are also sinners, but they will not be judged so by their peers, so they will continue live the lie that they are good people, nothing like those abusers they have called out.

It is not my intention to slam the people of the film industry, but merely to suggest that when it comes to right and wrong, we are really very handicapped. We trust in ourselves, so we try to reinterpret God's commandments to make ourselves come out in a good light.

In writing to the Christians of Corinth, Paul aimed to show them the extent of their spiritual handicap. Though they named Jesus their Lord, they still lived much like the average unbeliever. They competed with each other, trying to prove themselves better than the other in their congregation. They accepted sexual misbehavior in their midst, not considering it much of a problem. They also allowed false teachings about Jesus to erode their confidence in the resurrection of the dead.

With each paragraph Paul wrote, he made it clear that the Corinthians were guilty of pride in themselves. They still believed that they were wise enough and strong enough to live God-pleasing lives themselves. "Look at us, we can speak in tongues!" "We have a better Bible teacher in Apollos than you do in Paul."

We can fall into similar traps today. The teaching of the Reformation is a precious gift of God, but we can misuse it. We can twist our Lutheran heritage into a badge of honor and deceive ourselves into thinking that we are better than other Christians because of what we believe. Within our own congregation, we can get to thinking that because of what we have done for our church or still are doing, we merit a certain honor and respect from

others. Our sinful pride insidiously works to set our hearts on ourselves instead of God, and the First Commandment soberly warns us that such self-confidence condemns us before God.

We are neither strong enough nor wise enough to help ourselves here, only God is. God helps us through the message of Jesus, His Son. Jesus died for our pride, our unbelief and the rest of our sins. God raised Him from the dead to declare us forgiven and redeemed to live at peace with Him and with our neighbors.

Never mind that the word of the cross is despised by most people in the world. They still believe that they are good enough for God, and sadly, at least for now, they are perishing; that is, they are living their lives under God's judgment, totally unprepared to meet Him.

Listen to Jesus. He lived and died to restore us to the wisdom and the strength of trusting in our Creator. He was raised from the dead to show us that through Him we can learn to live new lives. No more covering our sins or dressing them up as something that is OK. No more boasting over our accomplishments as if we were gods ourselves. But let there be repentance that leads us to confess with God's law our foolishness and weakness, and faith that praises God for the gift of His Son, who is our wisdom, our strength, our holiness, and our righteousness before God now, on Judgment Day and forever. Glory be to Jesus! Amen.