

Sermon Philippians 3 4 14 17th Sunday after Pentecost series A

Sermon: 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Philippians 3:4b-14

Theme: Pursuing the right goal

Goal: That the Holy Spirit lift up our eyes to the eternal goal

Dear Friends,

Introduction: When you drive a car, you look in front (me too...). Sometimes you have to look to the rear-view mirror to see what is happening behind you. But you cannot drive looking only to the rear-view mirror. You have to look to the front and to know where you are going. And when you come to a roundabout, you have to take the correct lane if you go left, or straight, or right.

This is not a traffic class, but it is something similar to what Paul does in our text and he encourages us to do the same in our lives. He presses on toward the goal he wants to reach; but he looks behind and does an analysis of the road he had already passed in his life before his encounter with Jesus. There is a “before” and an “after” in his journey. And what is the most important thing for him? Not his past anymore, about which he used to boast; but his future with Christ is the goal of his life and of his ministry.

I – The experience and example of Paul

If we link this text with the Gospel for today – The Parable of the Tenants – we can say that Paul fits in it as one of the “wretched tenants”. As a Pharisee, he had been a hard worker in God’s vineyard, very zealous in obeying the Law, and, as he himself describes his former behaviour, “as for legalistic righteousness, faultless”. But he was one of the tenants that even had helped to kill one of the servants God sent to collect the fruits: Stephen, the first martyr of the Christian Church, was stoned; “and Saul was there, giving approval to his death” (Acts 8:1). He thought he was doing

something right according to his understanding of the Law. But he was wrong. And he acknowledges it in our text, considering all his former efforts to serve God in his own way as rubbish and loss. (Bishop Dieter mentioned it in his sermon last Sunday). But God had mercy on Paul. *God did not bring this wretched man to his wretched and deserved end; he brought him to a blessed end, confronting him on a road to Damascus and turning Saul the Persecutor into Paul the Apostle.* (Phil Brandt, 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pent.)

Now, that Paul found Christ, or, better, that he was found by Christ, who had called him out of darkness to His bright light, he has a totally different view of his life and of the goal of his life. “Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God had called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” this is his statement now! *The zealous Pharisee became a zealous Christian. He is working far harder now than he ever did as a Pharisee, but it is totally different; it is Christ working in him; it is in response to that upward call of God in Christ Jesus. This is no works righteousness which finds confidence in the deeds I do, but it is a deed which flows out of the confidence which Christ has worked in His deed on a cross.* (Phil Brandt, 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pent.)

## II – Our experiences

During my ministry, several people came to me and opened their hearts telling me about their past: their wrongs, their mistakes, their vices and failures... For some, the burden of the past was heavy, and they needed to be absolved and comforted with God’s forgiveness by faith in Jesus; because Jesus had died for each of those past sins. For others, these reports were just a manner of sharing with me how gracious God has been in their lives, bringing them from the wrong way to the straight way by grace through faith in Jesus. In any case, when we think about our “big” sins or “little” sins of the past, we all

have to be sure that all sins had been paid by Jesus on the cross and that “past is past” when we trust that we are forgiven by the grace of Jesus, - as Saul was forgiven and transformed to Paul, the Apostle. *Our Lord does not dwell on our past failures or successes* (ABC p. 1446). *The memory of past sins can cause to lose sight of the prize. Yet we don't have to dwell on those sins because Christ's resurrection proves He atone for all sin* (Series A, p. 216). Jesus set in front of our eyes a new goal for our lives; and, like Paul, we press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus! *And that means that our lives can continue, despite our past, to bear witness to the marvellous love of God. In fact, our past and present sins can even be occasions when God's light shines most brightly, as they did in the life of Paul.* (Phil Brandt, 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pent.)

### III - Our goals

What are the goals of your life? At our Convention last week, one of our key speakers said that one of his goals is to work till he reaches 80 years old!!! - We can set a goal to have a good retirement; to get a better position at our company; to get a better job; to improve our health; to travel somewhere... They are all good and possible goals. - What are the goals for St. Thomas? We have just achieved a nice goal: To host FELSISA's Convention; and, thank God, everything went well. We have a Five-Year Plan, which is not being achieved as planned. Our growth is slow, our finances are declining... Are just these our goals?

*If there is nothing to strive for, no goal to achieve, life becomes drab and aimless. We all need something toward which to strive. In our text Paul describes the pressings on that characterizes our life as Christians* (Series A, p. 215).

But we know that earthly goals will have an end. Above all, our goal must be to work as faithful tenants in Gods vineyard in the various

calls we have as parents, business men, Church leaders, or whatever we are able or challenge to do, remaining faithful to our God by faith in Jesus till we reach the final goal of our faith, the salvation in heaven. As St. Thomas, we want to remain faithful to the Gospel and to the Sacraments, not just to preserve ourselves, but to share with as many as possible the Good News of God's love in Jesus. *God wants us to keep moving forward by having faith in Him until the day of victory. A mark of a Christian is keeping on towards the goal, trusting in the Lord despite the circumstances. A Christian is like a runner who looks forward to crossing the finishing line... Final perfection is not to be achieved on this side of the grave. Until that time comes, there will always be room for progress. The Christian will keep moving forward, persevering in his pursuit of what Christ has for him* (ABC p. 1446). Paul writes: “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”

Conclusion: Paul's life is a great example of God's grace and love. *Our failures of the past do not mean that God has given up on us. He sent the prophets, He sent the Son, He continues to send and appeal and reconcile His sinful people through His ministers.* (Phil Brandt, 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pent.)

FELSISA's Core Values give us good guidelines for strain toward: *Trusting - Welcoming – Caring – Moving Forward with Christ.* And our own logo gives the tune: *Loved by God - Loving Others.*

In his pressing on toward the goal, Paul confesses at the end of this chapter, and we confess with him: But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Amen.