

Second Sunday after Pentecost, Epistle, Year A

BLESSED BOASTING

Second Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 5:1-8

Analysis by Steven E. Albertin

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. 3And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

6For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. 8But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

DIAGNOSIS: Badly Boasting

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): The Boasting Mash Up

Listen to anyone long enough and they will eventually boast (v. 2) about something. Everyone likes to brag even if it occasionally is veiled under feigned humility. Which reminds me of the fellow who insisted, "I am not proud. Pride is a fault and I have no faults." Hmmm. Who is fooling whom? It is a common theme that underlies all the disparate voices of human life:

Life is ultimately about being right. Everyone wants to be good (v. 6). Listen to what people boast and brag about and you will hear all the songs of humanity merge into the world's greatest mash up: I am good!

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): The Boasting Cover Up

We boast of our strength and brag about our success. However, such noisy self-promotion merely disguises the weakness and insecurity lurking in our hearts. Such boasting reflects the fear that our success is fleeting and that suffering and failure are hiding just around the corner. Such boasting hides the fact that we know that our goodness has cracks and our righteousness is flawed. Such boasting reveals that our hearts are hanging not on God's promises but on our own feeble and weak-kneed attempts to justify our lives. Our boasting is the ultimate cover-up of the fact that we do not trust God; we trust only in our attempts to look good. Our boasting conceals the failures we know we have but want no one else to know . . . even God.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): The Impact of Boasting

Of course, trying to hide from God is futile. God sees into our hearts and knows what we are trying to cover up: that we are ungodly, that we are not the righteous, good folk we pretend to be but actually are sinners destined to receive the judgment the ungodly deserve. The boasting that we refuse to give up signals that we are headed for the collision from which there is no escape. Guess who survives such an impact with God? Certainly not us. Everyone is destined for the cemetery: God's final and just verdict against the ungodly.

PROGNOSIS: Blessed Boasting

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): God's Boast

But God will not leave us in the cemetery or to live our lives in perpetual fear of ending up there. God does not want his last word for the ungodly to be judgment. God is determined to prove his love for us (v. 8). So “while we were still weak, at the right time [just in time!] Christ died for the ungodly” (v. 6). We might think of giving away our lives for a worthy cause and or a worthy person, but not for ungodly scoundrels like us who gleefully boast when we ought to be ashamed (v. 7). But God—who sends his boy to take our place, to suffer what we deserve and to die—doesn’t think or act like us. Instead, in his generous self-giving we are set free from the fate we were doomed to suffer. We get to live. We have peace (v. 1) with the One who was out to get us.

Now, if anyone is going to boast of something, let it be God. That is exactly what happens when the good news of God’s grace is proclaimed. God boasts that God’s love has triumphed not only over the sin of the ungodly but also over God’s own judgment of the ungodly . . . all because of Christ.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Boasting of Christ

Because we have been graced (v. 2) with God’s love that has been poured into our hearts (v. 5), we are no longer afraid of being weak or exposed as failures. We are righteous. We get to stand tall (v. 2), no longer cowering in shame or embarrassment. Even though we are ungodly sinners, because of Christ we trust that we have been justified (v. 1), forgiven and at last made good. Surprisingly and unexpectedly, we even get to boast. However, now it is a different kind of boasting. We boast not about what we have done but what God has done in Christ (v. 2).

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Boasting with Hope

Our boasting continues in ways that the world would never expect. The world expects winners to boast of what they have

accomplished. However, boasting of what we hope will happen someday in the future seems foolish and premature. Yet, “we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God” (v. 2). It is not foolish or premature because by faith the “glory” is already ours. Even the suffering of which the world fears and from which it flees, we boast (v. 3). We boast freely in the midst of the very suffering that apart from Christ would undermine our character and confidence (v. 4). However, “since we are justified by faith (and) we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 1), such boasting is based on a hope that will never disappoint (v. 5). Therefore, even the face of the suffering and hardship that would make most people crumble, we get to endure and persist because our hope is in Christ. Such hope is not up to us. Such hope is up to God at work in us through the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 5).

Therefore, we have a new character (4) that does not need to pretend to be what we are not or boast of what we have not done. Instead, we can tell the truth, admit our sin, stand tall and boast, because at the right time Christ died for ungodly folk just like us.