

Text: Philippians 3:7-11.

16th Sunday after Pentecost.

September 4, 2016.

Grace and peace are yours through the works of Christ. Amen.

Work. How do you view it? A four-letter word? A necessary evil? You're probably happy to have a three-day weekend, some time without work. Talking to a lot of people it seems like the biggest goal in life is to retire and not have to work. We can easily lose sight that work is a gift from God. Even in paradise, the Garden of Eden, when the world was perfect, God gave Adam and Eve work to do: take care of the garden. So work is more than a necessary evil. Work is a gift from God. But we can go to the other extreme and see work as the number one most important thing in life. Have to work. Have to work. Have to work. We spend more time working than doing anything else except sleeping and maybe even some weeks work more than sleep and work can become the only thing that matters in life.

And we easily can do the same with spiritual works, or good works. They can easily become the only thing that matters in life. We can easily think that good works will be my ticket to heaven. So God's Word today will show us a different way. Christ's works are what really matters in my life. Your works, not mine, O Christ, will get me to heaven. Your works, not mine, O Christ, declare me right in your sight. Your works, not mine, O Christ are what really matter. Your works, not mine, O Christ. Your works, not mine, O Christ.

The part of the Bible in front of us, Philippians, was written by a man named Paul. He spent his early life with every spiritual advantage, doing every good work he could think of. During this time in his life he thought all this work was gain. He thought it would profit him in the greatest way: get him to heaven. He made the list. Circumcised on the eighth day. That was the ritual that marked you as one of God's people. He had the right ancestry, from the people of Israel, that special nation God chose to be his own. And Paul was more Israelite than most. But one thing he considered of the greatest gain. He worked hard, outwardly to keep all the laws. And he thought that by keeping all the laws, he would be right with God. He thought that all his works would earn his spot in heaven. At least, that's what he used to think.

But now, he thought differently. Now he considered all those advantages losses. Why? Because they were getting in the way of knowing Christ. Paul viewed everything he thought was a gain as a loss, because all those works were getting in the way of Christ. All that trying to be right with God by works was getting in the way of the only way to be right with God: Christ's works. His works were getting in the way of Christ. His works were making him think he didn't need Christ. That made those works the greatest loss of all, because he lost sight of Christ.

And doesn't that sound just like us? We turn every spiritual advantage into a loss. How many of you were baptized when you were too young to remember? And now think, "I'm set for life"? How many of you had Christian parents? And we think, "I've got the right ancestry. I'm good." How many of you came to church, even on a holiday weekend, made it a priority to come before the campout and the low attendance gives you a smug and self-righteous smile. I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing, not like those other people. All of those advantages are losses when they get in the way of Christ. All that self-righteousness is sin.

Your works, not mine, O Christ. The greatest gain is Christ. The surpassing worth is knowing Christ. Your works, O Christ, declare me right in God's sight. It's your perfect life, O Christ, that gives me perfection. Your works, O Christ, have taken away my sin. It was your perfect and innocent sacrifice that forgave me. My works can't do that. It was your death that gives me life. It is your life that assures me of eternal life. Your works, not mine, O Christ, that what matters. Your works, not mine, O Christ, that's the

greatest gain.

To know Christ, that's the greatest gain. And not to just know some facts about Jesus. And not to just recite some trite phrases, like Jesus lived and died and rose. But to intimately know Christ from his Word, to have experienced the love of Christ in the deepest part of your soul, to have a personal relationship with Christ as your Savior, the one who loves you, the one you are in love with above all others, to have this personal, intimate knowledge, that is the greatest gain. That is the real treasure. Everything else is loss. I consider everything else garbage. The word garbage was used in a couple of contexts. You can ask me about some in the sermon discussion after church today. This is a word for something really nasty, like the food thrown away after a feast. Once about three days after a summer potluck I had to take some garbage out to the dumpster. You've smelled that smell as you walk up. And then you open the lid and you make the face and almost fall over because of the stench. And there's flies and maggots and you just throw the stuff in there, close the lid and run away as fast as you can. That's garbage. And what is that garbage? Anything that gets in the way of me knowing Christ.

Actually, Paul focused on one thing that was garbage above all garbage. It was this thought, "I can get right with God by trying to keep the law." As though it were, "My works, not yours, O Christ." That's the biggest, stinkiest pile of garbage ever. That idea that I can be right with God by my works is so natural and so easy. So God here erases that idea. **Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.**

I don't get right with God on my own. I don't get right with God by trying to keep that law. Your works, not mine, O Christ. My right standing with God comes from God. The only way for me to be right with God is through Christ and his works, not my works. Your works, not mine, O Christ. This is the main message of the Bible. This is the message the Bible repeats over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over. Really! I have computer software for Bible study. One of the tools on this software is called a cross-reference. It lists other passages in the Bible that speak of the same topic or say something similar. Of all the passages I have studied and checked the cross references, this passage had more than any other. This passage! I don't get right with God on my own, by trying to keep the law. I get right with God by what God has done, gave Christ to be my Savior. That's the main message of the Bible. That's the message the Bible repeats over and over. This message: your works, not mine, O Christ. That's what the Bible can't stop saying. Your works, not mine, O Christ. That's what the Bible emphasizes. Your works, not mine, O Christ. Don't forget that. Your works, not mine, O Christ. Hear it again. It's so easy to forget. Your works, not mine, O Christ.

There's a definite certainty that comes with God's plan. Because righteousness comes from God, we can be sure it's perfect and holy. If righteousness came from us, would we ever be sure it was good enough for God? One of our chores at home growing up was vacuuming. And my parents loved carpet. They had carpet in the kitchen. In the bathrooms. One house even had some carpet on the walls! The vacuuming wasn't so terrible. It was the inspection done by my father, the engineer. After "finishing" a room, we learned to say, with a puzzled and uncertain look, "Dad, I think I'm done." He would move the chairs from around the kitchen table. He would pick up the rugs on top of the carpet in the bathroom. The one thing you were certain of was that your work wasn't good enough. Imagine going before God and saying, "God, I think I'm good enough. I think I've met your holy standard." How long will it take God to find one sin?

The good news is we don't have to go before God with our works. Christ already vacuumed perfectly. God doesn't inspect our work. God inspects Christ's work! Your works, not mine, O Christ! God gives us righteousness because of what Christ has already done, not because of what we should have done!

There's certainty in this righteousness from God, on the basis of faith.

There's power in this righteousness from God. The power of Christ's resurrection. Think about that. The power that raised Christ from the dead, we know that power, because we have been raised from the dead spiritually in baptism and we will be raised from the dead physically to live with Jesus in heaven forever. That's some power.

Paul had seen that power in his own life. He went from killing Christians to being one of them. He went from bringing suffering on those who followed Christ to being one of those who suffered for following Christ. Wow! That's some power that Christ brings. Who would want to participate in sufferings? Well, when you know that you are already righteous in God's eyes, some earthly suffering won't take that away. When you intimately and personally know Christ, you know this fact, "Christ never sinned and he got crucified for it." As Christ's power gives me the strength to overcome sin, I will suffer for it. What seems the morally right thing for everyone else, may not be the morally right thing for the one who is following Christ. Being in the minority doesn't take away my right standing with God. What everyone else calls hate the follower of Jesus might see as true love. And what popular opinion calls love the follower of Christ sees as garbage, as leading people away from Christ, the one person who can declare us right with God. Knowing Christ is to become more like him. Knowing Christ is to participate in his sufferings.

Knowing Christ is the confidence that I will attain to the resurrection from the dead. Don't be confused by the "somehow" in verse eleven. It's not a maybe. In fact, one translation says, "With the confidence that I'll come back to life." Another says, "By any means possible I will rise from the dead." We just can't wait to rise from the dead and be with Jesus, we'll endure whatever suffering we have to. We so long for that resurrection we'll do whatever it takes to get there.

And you see, then and only then can we see work and works in their proper place. I don't have to do good works to get to heaven. I'm already going there. I don't have to pile up my own works to get right with God. Jesus already piled up his perfect works so I am right with God. My works don't matter. Christ's works do. Your works, not mine, O Christ. Your works, not mine, O Christ. Amen.