

“Found in Christ” | Rev. Tim Frickenschmidt | 4th Sunday after Epiphany (1/30/2022)

Ecclesiastes 1:2-3; 3:9-15

<sup>1,2</sup> Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. <sup>3</sup>What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?

<sup>3:12</sup> I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; <sup>13</sup> also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God’s gift to man.

<sup>14</sup> I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; ...

Philippians 3:1-11

<sup>3:1</sup>... To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

<sup>2</sup> Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. <sup>3</sup> For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— <sup>4</sup> though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> 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; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. <sup>7</sup> But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> 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 <sup>9</sup> 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— <sup>10</sup> that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Luke 18:18-25

<sup>18:18</sup> And a ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ... <sup>22</sup> When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” <sup>23</sup> But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. <sup>24</sup> Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

**Introduction** Retelling a conversation with a 5-year old member who said that “at church we always celebrate Christmas, just not on the right date,” Tim reminded us that joy is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. It is also at the heart of what Paul is emphasizing in Philippians. He also recounted Leslie Newbiggin’s 3-fold definition of what it means to be “found in Christ” – believing in the good news after hearing the Word preached; being baptized into and continuing to live in light of the covenant of God; and living joyfully with our hearts and lives full of the Holy Spirit.

**Three Points**

Paul warns the church at Philippi to look out for “the dogs” – a group of Jewish Christians insisting that gentile believers be circumcised and live within the constraints of the Mosaic law. Jews loathed dogs for their unclean habits and used “dogs” as the ultimate insult, but Paul turns that insult back on them.

He goes on to expose the error of placing our “confidence in the flesh”, contrasting that with glory of Christ and the righteousness “that comes through the faithfulness of Christ” (3:9) This echoes the “vanity” of Ecclesiastes – the tendency we all have to place inordinate value on ultimately empty things.

And he continues with an accounting image – transferring his list of “confidence in the flesh” from the “gain” column to the “loss” column, recognizing that he can do nothing to earn God’s approval. God does not care about our “list” – fame, success, family status, politics, etc.; He cares about us.

**Discuss:**

- 1.) Who do you see (and treat) as “dogs” – unclean, unacceptable and unapproachable? Why? What do you think is at the root of that attitude?
- 2.) What is your “list”? How are you finding your identity in or seeking approval through the “vanities” of this world?
- 3.) In “Ash Wednesday”, W.H. Auden asked, “Teach me to care and not to care.” What do you need to care more about? Less about?
- 4.) How are you treating secondary things as your primary identity? What is keeping you from getting rid of this “good rubbish” in your life?

**Conclusion/Application**

Meditate on “the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord” and consider what it means to be “found in Him” having a “righteousness that comes through Christ’s faithfulness.” How does that free you to experience joy?