



June 16, 2019 Feast of the Holy Trinity

Given by Rev. Mattei

[John 16:12-15](#)

“The higher you go the harder the fall” the saying goes. It’s probably a paraphrase from [Proverbs 29:23](#) and a warning against pride. “There is perhaps no one of our natural passions so hard to subdue as pride. Beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive. Even if I could conceive that I had completely overcome it, I should probably be proud of my humility.”¹

So, how could Paul write, “Since we are justified by faith...we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.”? Boasting feels so prideful, so full of oneself, an attitude that turns people off. “Pride is the only disease that makes everyone sick but the one who has it.”² Yet, Paul encourages Christians to boast. What he is suggesting is that we keep in mind a very fundamental distinction in full disclosure and humility. It’s not of our own accomplishments that we boast (though we feel satisfaction and enjoy the popularity of people’s acknowledgement and the occasional pat on the back-shouldn’t there be more of that?). We boast of God’s accomplishments in us, through us and for us.

For Paul, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is all the confidence we need. Our hope, therefore, depends not on what we are able to do but on what God has already done. The resurrection is the vision of how things will turn out. The Christ figure is the prototype and the end product, the Alpha and the Omega, the blueprint of our DNA and the fulfilled human being, the Son in whom God finds delight and into whom we are called to grow ([Eph 1:11-13](#)). This enables us to see what the world cannot see—that even in the midst of struggle our future is assured, and even today we have in faith a taste of what is to come. Our confidence is in the One who is faithful, we boast in Christ for our calling is to inhabit the Triune God.

¹ Benjamin Franklin, from his autobiography.

² Source unknown.

From this angle, we assume a position of strength even when all we know is hardship.³ In a world where loss, grief, anxiety, and fear abound, there is no shortage of people in our midst in need of reassurance. From this position, we can console and give comfort. The challenge is to remain humble and not assume an arrogant and judgmental attitude. In fact, what makes us claim to have the Spirit of discernment? What are the external signs? Many Christians assume a sense of entitlement just because they are Christians. They seem to proclaim with pride: “We have Jesus, the Son of God. What do other religions have?” With that arrogant declaration, they set themselves to judge the whole world, and just because one is a non-Christian or a non-believer, one is automatically condemned to hell. To some Christians, the heaven-hell dichotomy seems to be an all-consuming thought. We would do well in assuming a simpler, humbler and non-judgmental attitude and let the Word of God be the judge ([Jn 12:45-47](#)).

As a pastor I have heard many stories where people live cut off from one another in the aftermath of hurtful words spoken in anger during quarrels. Pride impedes people to make the first step and pick up the phone or send an e-mail. The tragic thing is that this can go on for years, or worst forever. An even greater tragedy is that a vast number of human beings live like that in relation to God. When faith is not developed and people are left with the Sunday School or Confirmation level resources, it is not uncommon to reject a God who feels absent, indifferent or even cruel when tragedy strikes. Sooner or later, they outgrow *that* God. I don't blame them, in fact, I want them to outgrow that God; but then I need to know: what God are they talking about? Our God desires to be found, and when we find God we find ourselves.

The fact is, all of us are hurt in more than one way. We all walk with our wounds whether we are aware of them or not, whether they inform our feelings, attitudes and behavior from the background of our consciousness like a computer operating system or we have learned to find power in our pain. We may live in fear and with a victim mentality, in suspicion of others and with a blaming attitude, in bitter anger towards the whole world and with judgment and shame. If that is the case, we don't enjoy life and make it difficult for those around us. Or we may learn from our pain (see Beethoven's 5th Symphony in C minor or the *Symphony of Fate*, written at a time when he was already hard of hearing and suffering from tinnitus⁴) and find solidarity in the Crucified and risen One who accompanies us on our way. We learn to accept life's pain, embrace it, and work with it. Through that wisdom, we become wounded healers and people of hope ([Rom 1:1-7](#); [5:1-5](#)).

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EtyVdC7E6Wo>;
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slaT8JI2zpl&list=RDCLAK5uy_mU14EejSbDsfLuPc9KpNzoC0o-YQvi6l4&index=13

⁴ <https://www.dw.com/en/beethovens-fifth-symphony-the-truth-about-the-symphony-of-fate/a-45472113>

God's ultimate goal is for us to be reconciled to God and as such become ambassadors of that same reconciliation ([2 Cor 5:20](#)). By professing in faith Jesus as our Lord we are given a pass, through grace, to live in companionship with God. Grace not only announces God's favor towards us, free of charge through the sacrificial love of Jesus but also and especially it introduces us to the mystical and glorious Presence of God who draws us closer to Godself like a gravitational force. Bishop N. T. Write explains that Grace is "almost a shorthand for the presence and power of God himself."⁵ By Grace we find ourselves pulled to the Center.

The gospel of John assures us that the Spirit will guide us to all the truth in the future, for the right word we need to hear at the proper time. There is truth (as in truth-telling, facts that can be checked) and Truth (as in the heart of the matter, an insight into a deeper reality). *Paying attention* to the Word of Truth rising from inside of us, to the promptings of the Spirit that dwells within will come easier as we make friends and become familiar with the Spirit of God in us. The assertiveness here is not the product of cerebral knowledge but of the reassurance of a spiritual Presence that resembles the comforting and grounding words that Jesus offered the disciples along their journey together.

Dwelling in the Spirit opens us to new depths of union with all people, gives us a taste of true love, produces greater understanding, and encourages us to persevere in patience, compassion, and hope. It's an inner freedom that lets us see reality with new eyes. For us Christians, to develop right discernment means to grow in the Spirit of the Word through Bible study, prayer, meditation, and the celebration of the sacraments.

Next time you find yourself sitting in prayer or walking before your God, try the vulnerability of transparent honesty and the humility of naked simplicity, and the promise of the peace that passes all understanding will be yours ([Phil 4:4-8](#)).

⁵ N. T. Write, Paul for Everyone: Romans, Part 1, p. 83.