

Pentecost 21, 2008
Good Hope Lutheran Church
Philippians 3: 7 – 8

From the letter of Paul the apostle to the Philippians, this is from chapter 3. Paul says, Whatever gains I had in life, these I have come to regard as loss because of Jesus Christ. More than that even—I regard *everything* as loss, because of the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ as Lord.

The Lord be with you. And let us pray:
Father in heaven you have blessed us with many good gifts, yet one alone is needful, and that is knowing your Son Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Keep us faithful to Jesus in word and in deed, and when the day of death comes and we have to let go of everything else, let it be that we still have hold of Jesus, and that He still has hold of us, unto life everlasting. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, AMEN.

On television these days, there seem to be several shows with more or less the same basic premise. What I have in mind are those home repair/home improvement shows, in which a team of professional decorators and interior design experts and, personal efficiency coaches, they meet up with an all-American family. And this family, they're always likeable people all right, but they're slob. They're slob, and their home is totally disorganized, with clothing and trinkets and junk scattered everywhere, in a house that just, looks like a train wreck. And it always quietly makes you feel good to watch these shows, because you're thinking Man. I'm bad. But I'm not THAT bad.

But anyway, the experts promise to fix the house up and make it look nice, and they always begin the process, by compelling the family to have a garage sale, to just get rid of all the stuff. You notice, how hard that always is? How the family struggles with that? "Oh I can't possibly part with this Mongolian beer mug, it's made from genuine yak hide!" "Oh I have to hang on to that pair of shoes, it goes perfect with an outfit I've got buried under a stack there somewhere in the living room." The garage sale is always hard on these folks, they always have a reason for keeping everything, and we're sitting there watching it all on TV thinking Why is this so hard? The yak-hide beer mug is junk, it's ugly, get rid of it! That should be easy!

But of course it isn't easy, as we know from our own lives. We collect stuff too—we're pretty

bad about this as well—think about your attic. Think about your closet, think about your garage. I remember moving off to college all those years ago, with one suitcase and a manual typewriter. Good grief, what size truck would it take to move us now? We know we don't need most of it, we scarcely even want it, but do we get rid of it? Far from it—there's more shopping to do this Christmas, after all, yippee! More useless stuff to get.

And it's not just stuff we collect. Worse still, it's habits. Habits—ways we are accustomed to spending our money, ways we are accustomed to spending our time—for instance, is there really such a thing as Must see TV? Really? There are ways we have become accustomed to speaking to one another, there are ways we are in the habit of acting with one another. The vices that have accumulated in your life over the years, the pet sins that have piled up, the long long list of good deeds left undone—if a film crew could look into your heart they way the way these shows look into someone else's living room. What would they find? How junky is your life by now, anyway.

Pretty junky, I bet. And what St. Paul offers us in Philippians chapter 3 is not a personal efficiency coach or a home design expert. What Paul offers us is better by far, it's the Lord Jesus Christ. Look at it this way, says Paul. It's pretty simple. If it's not of Christ, it is of junk. If Christ wouldn't want it, you don't need it. If Jesus wouldn't do it, you can stop doing it too—a very plain standard to go by. Jesus!—it is of the Lord, or it is not.

And Paul is fearless in applying the standard of Christ to his own life. Look what he talks about in the opening verses today—not things, but his family, and family connections. He talks about the success he has achieved in life, and the level of respect he has earned, touchy stuff. But only stuff, says Paul, even this, and if it's not of Christ, it is of junk. If it doesn't fit into a coffin, I guess I don't need it. And all that will fit into a coffin really and truly, is the God who has hold of me, and who will not let go.

I want to know Christ, said St. Paul. I want to know the power of His resurrection in my daily life, I want to see the power of His resurrection at work in my daily decisions and choices and

habits; I want to see Him at work in my personal relationships and in my professional life and yes in my long overdue garage sale too. I want to know Christ and see Him at work in my life, so that I also may know Christ and see Him at work in my death—that through Him I too may attain the resurrection from the dead, and a share in the life of the world to come. That's what matters, says Paul. That's what's valuable. All else is junk.

You watch those home improvement shows I mentioned, you plainly see how tightly people like us hold on to junk, and how tightly the junk holds on to us. Well here's Good News: More tightly still does God in Christ hold on to us. Neither life nor death nor anything in between can ever separate us from the love of God which is ours in Christ Jesus, certainly not the things of this world. Nothing can separate us from His love, nothing can loosen His hold on us. May we here know that, may we be assured and inspired this day by the hold our God has on us. And may this be the day we start letting go of all the stuff in our lives, the better to hold on to Him. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, AMEN.