

Lent 4

22 March 2009

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Ascension Lutheran Church

“We Are God’s Workmanship”

Ephesians 2.8-10

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Our text is from today’s 2nd lesson: Ephesians 2.8-10. Verses 8 & 9 are especially dear to Lutherans, engraved in our hearts: “We are saved by God’s grace thru faith in Jesus Christ. And that faith is not our own doing – it is God’s work in us. Not because of anything we have done – so there’s no cause for us to brag about our faith.” And then St. Paul goes on in verse 10: “For we are what God has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works.” I really like how that is translated in the NIV: “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.”

I love that phrase: **we are God’s workmanship**. And I invite you to look at that with me this morning through the lens of the Holy Trinity. We are God’s workmanship:

The Father has created us,
the Son has redeemed us,
the Holy Spirit sanctifies us.

We are God’s workmanship.

In Psalm 139 the Psalmist declares “I will praise you, Lord, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. It was you, Lord, who formed my inward parts. You knit me together in my mother’s womb. My frame was not hidden from you when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.”

The Psalmist praises God for the gift of life. Credits God for shaping him in the womb without understanding how God does that. The Psalmist probably pictured God taking little “people parts” and popping them together like legos: little arms and legs and fingers. Today we know its even more miraculous than that! God created the genetic code, a divine blueprint. Mother and father become collaborators with God in contributing unique bits and pieces of that code, and that code becomes a Divine Word – different for every living human being – creating and calling us to life.

It is a greater miracle than the Psalmist could ever envision. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. We are God’s workmanship!

Created by the Father and then re-created in Christ. “If anyone is in Christ,” St. Paul says in 2Corinthians, “s/he is a new Creation! Everything old has passed away: see, everything has become new!” Born a first time to human parents, we are born again in Christ as Children of God. Born a first time pointed towards death, we are born again in Christ pointed towards life. Born a first time separated from God, we are born again in Christ reconciled to God. Born a first time covered in the sin common to human flesh, we are born again in Christ covered with His righteousness!

God covers me with the righteousness of Christ. The righteousness of Christ covers my sin. I am holy and righteous in the eyes of God not because of anything that I have done, but because I am covered with Christ.

That is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That is the “good news”. But for so many people it’s just “too good to be true”! “It can’t be that simple! Oh, I can believe God can forgive me. But before my guilt is laid to rest, there must be something I must do to make amends.” If you listen carefully, you hear that all the time.

There is significant and appropriate outrage over the bonuses AIG paid to fund managers whose only real accomplishment was to create a financial crisis. AIG's CEO Edward Liddy apologized to a Congressional committee. Later I saw on the news an incensed Congressman who said "That apology is not enough ... it's like saying one Hail Mary if you committed murder."

He's right: those bonuses should never have been paid, and a simple apology to the American people is not enough. The money should be returned and people prosecuted if laws broken.

But his comment is rooted in the notion that we have to pay God back for our offenses. "It's like saying one Hail Mary if you committed murder ... Why everyone knows that's not enough. To get God to forgive you for murder you'd have to do a whole lot more."

But the Gospel really is the Good News that God forgives my sins completely for the sake of Jesus who paid on the cross for the sins of the whole world. My sins are covered not by the depth of my contrition or by my attempts to make amends. My sins are covered by the righteousness of Christ. **My sins are covered by the righteousness of Christ.**

We are God's workmanship!

But that work is not yet completed! The Holy Spirit is sanctifying us. Which means, in simplest terms: Be patient with me ... God isn't finished with me yet. God is not finished with me and God is not finished with you.

We are God's Children right now, but don't always live day in and day out as Children of God. The Holy Spirit is growing us in that direction.

We are destined for eternal life in the presence of God, but don't always live day in and day out as heaven-bound people. The Holy Spirit is growing us in that direction.

We are, right now, covered with the righteousness of Christ, but are not yet all that we will be. The Holy Spirit is growing us in that direction.

In Philippians 3 St. Paul has this wonderful auto-biographical sketch of his life "BC" and "AC": before experiencing Christ and after experiencing Christ. BC he believed that he had to earn God's favor. He dedicated his life to doing those things he believe would win God over to his side – even persecuted Christians to please God.

In Christ he learned that God couldn't love him more than he does. And that he is right in God's eyes not by what he has done, but by what Christ has done on his behalf.

"I want to know Christ," he writes. "I want to know the power of His resurrection. I want to share in his sufferings, and have a stake in the resurrection to eternal life." But, he says, I don't have it all in hand. I haven't reached the goal. I not all that I will be in Christ. God is still at work in my life, completing, perfecting, polishing what he has started in Christ.

The Holy Spirit is still at work in our lives, in Word and Sacraments, completing, perfecting, polishing what he has started in Christ. We are works in progress!

I need to be patient with me, because God isn't finished with me yet. And I need you to be patient with me, because God isn't finished with me yet. And I need to be patient with you, because God isn't finished with you yet. We are, in Christ, diamonds in the rough. But the Holy Spirit is at work polishing us, perfecting us.

We are God's workmanship!

The Father has created us, the Son has redeemed us, the Holy Spirit is perfecting us: we are **God's workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus for good works.