



Sermon delivered by
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Quail Hollow Presbyterian Church
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"The Boast"
(Philippians 1: 21-30)

He invited me to lunch. He said he wanted to get to know me and to learn about the church, not Quail Hollow, but another church. But over our lunch it was I who ended up learning about him. He told me about his childhood, and that he entered kindergarten at the age of 4. He told me about being elected class president, once in elementary school, once in middle school, and then his senior year. He told me about winning some prize, and having his picture in the local paper, and then due to the picture he received fan mail. He told me of his athletic ability and his varsity letters. He told me of the colleges that had recruited him, and the college in New England from where he graduated. He told me how he met his wife. He told me about his job, and how he has been promoted, over and over again. He told me about his children, how smart, attractive, well-behaved they were. He told me where he and his family vacation in the summer *and* in the winter. Then, during bites of dessert, he looked at me and said he wanted to join the church, not Quail Hollow, but another church. He said he had a lot to offer, which was obvious. He said he wanted to be of help to the church. Soon after our lunch, that family did join the church, but not long afterwards he announced he was being transferred to another city. I have often wondered about that man and his family, whose children are now in their late 30s, and no doubt are as successful as their father. What lingers about that luncheon conversation is how that man enjoyed telling me about himself. At no time did I have to coax him to tell me about himself.

St. Paul speaks about the church in Philippi, a town once located near modern day Greece. Paul speaks about that congregation as people who *boasted* not about themselves but of Jesus Christ, the One Who was betrayed, Who died on a cross, but Whom God raised to new life. That congregation, those people had a reputation of boasting about that Jesus. They bragged on that Jesus. They let it be known that of all the gods they could believe in, there was only one God for them, and it was the One Who had been raised from the dead. Because of how those people in Philippi boasted, others came to know about Christ and His sacrificial

love, and because of Christ they were now living life in ways that spoke not of *self* but of service and faith and hope and joy and the kind of love that makes all things new. Those people in Philippi were pointing away from themselves, and they were giving all the credit, all the glory to Jesus Christ.

I ask you, *What did those people know about the Lord Jesus that caused them to brag and to boast about Him?* What was it about the Son of God that had so caught their attention, so convinced them that Christ was worth boasting about, boasting not about themselves, but about the One Who did not regard equality with God as something to boast about, the One Who willingly emptied Himself by taking on, by embracing, by accepting the status of a slave, a servant? Those early Philippian Christians boasted when it came to Christ, and when they spoke of their faith they pointed to Christ as the reason for their faith.

It is a fact of life that there are people who enjoy being whom they are. There are people who have huge personalities, whose presence fills up rooms bigger than this sanctuary; people who cause us to realize it is *all* about them, not about Christ, not about us, but all about them. It's their world, and we just happen to live in it. But that's not how Paul and the church in Philippi looked at life. They saw life all in terms of Jesus Christ, all in terms of His Lordship, His blessings, His teachings, His healings. They saw life all in terms of being *with* the risen Lord, be it in this life or in Paradise.

Paul makes it quite clear: he is in a no-lose situation. For Paul, living is Christ and dying is gain. They call that a win-win situation, and Paul was torn as to which was better. He decides it is better to remain in the flesh so he might be of help to the church and help them not to miss the privilege of telling others about the risen Christ. Paul could have boasted all day long about himself and his credentials, but that was nothing compared to boasting, to bragging on Christ. Paul had his own brag-sheet, but when it came to Christ he knew he had nothing to brag about, *nothing*. Paul's plan was to join in on the boasting and the bragging so others, so many others might come to know the risen Lord as he knew the risen Lord. And isn't that why we brag and why we boast? Our bragging and our boasting is for only one reason: so others come to know Whom we know, Jesus Christ. Isn't that the purpose of boasting and bragging? We become so convinced, so impressed about something or someone, be it ourselves or someone else, that we can't keep from bragging or boasting or even singing. During the Offertory, listen to the choir, and see if you can keep from singing.

At last week's Mission Dinner, we were told about the values the Millennials hold as priority for their generation. Millennials are people between the ages of 19 and 35. We

learned that if we want to attract members of the Millennial generation we will have to get our act together. Millennials have very specific likes and dislikes, and they know what they want and what they do not want. One thing they do not want is to wait. They want what they want, and they want it when? Now! That's why the prosperity gospel is popular with the Millennials. Name it and claim it, as they say. That's why St. Paul and the church in Philippi and the church at Quail Hollow Church boast and brag about Christ because when it comes to Christ there is no waiting. Christ is risen! He's here! He's with us! Being with Christ *now*, knowing Him *now*, learning from Him *now*, following Him *now*, spending time with Him *now* – that's living, and living not in terms of human limitations, but living in terms of what Christ is willing and able to do for us and with us, and not down the road but right now!

Yesterday, we had a wedding in this room, and during the wedding I was reminded of what I hear from brides and grooms. Having and receiving wedding gifts is nice and welcomed, but what I hear from brides and grooms is that being *with* the other is the far greater priority, far greater than the new blender or the set of steak knives. Being with the one you love now, *now* is what matters, not what you do or how much you earn or where you live. What matters is being with the other, *now*. That's why Paul boasted when it came to Christ. Christ is with us *now*, with us always. That's His promise, that's His unbreakable promise. There's no waiting for that promise to be fulfilled. It has happened, and we are reaping the benefits right now. The church in Philippi understood that, and they bragged about that, even at great risk to their welfare. Being with Christ, in the "here and now" or in the life to come, *being with* Christ makes the difference. Paul knew that difference, and to Paul that difference was worth everything, *everything*.

If you don't know it or if you have forgotten it, let me remind you that when it comes to you and me, we are the bride; the risen Christ is the groom. In baptism, we are united with Christ, we are wed to Christ, and being together, being with Christ is what makes life good, very good. Even when we suffer, even when we sacrifice, we prevail because Christ is with us. We are not alone. Young lovers know all about that, don't they? The Bible says, *Two are better than one. If they fall, one will lift up the other, but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help.* It's not about what you have or don't have. It's about being with the one you love and who loves you. When life is that good, you want the whole world to know what you know and whom you know. When life is that good, you are willing to boast and to brag and to make known that life doesn't get any better than when you are *with* the One Who loves you, and Who loves you no matter what. Our boast is that Jesus Christ is

with us, and when we fall, when we are in need, He is there with us and for us, and there is no waiting. Jesus says, *I am with you always.*

When life is that good, how can you keep from boasting and bragging and, of course, *singing?*

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, You have given us many reasons to brag on You; yet, we prefer to brag on “other” things, things that point to us and not to You. Inspire us to realize our abundance of reasons to brag on You, beginning with Your ever-present love for us. Amen.