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Devotional Essay #1
Friday, June 7, 2002

Our proposed objective for this morning is to grow as individuals and as church in our boldness in witnessing Jesus in whom only there is salvation, so that all may know his Name. Therefore let's start with prayer. So that the Word be brought to us.

As I struggled to put my ideas together for this presentation I could not think of a better start than asking myself, what is the reason Christians have for being bold in their witnessing about Jesus? Where does the power come from? According to Webster's dictionary, boldness implies 1- a fearless attitude before danger. 2A second meaning says that it is a fearless daring spirit, and still a 3rd meaning says: standing out prominently.

I invite you to reflect on some of the reason we have for being bold, fearless, and daring in our witnessing about Jesus Christ our Lord.

1-WITH BOLDNESS... For what we are

I would say that boldness grows out of the inner/outer assurance of what we are and what we have been made of in our life. With this definition I am referring to the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

But this presupposes we know who we are. Therefore the question stands before us: Do we know who we are? Who am I? How do I know Who I am? Are we in the search of the self?

For many an unfinished task, a never-ending path in life, a desperate search for many others.

- Anselm of Canterbury, the first scholastic around the year 1050, was in search of the rational elements in faith "Fides quaerens intellectum" was his drive.
- Victor Frankl a Jewish European existential psychologist, wrote in terms of "Man in search of meaning" departing from the Holocaust experience.
- So did E. Levinas French Jewish philosopher. Who sought meaning in the other (the neighbour) that confronts man with the commandment "thou shall not kill" but love your neighbour, and by fulfilling this commandment God manifests (epiphany) himself in the other to me. That is the way he understood it.
- Finally Pascal the French philosopher writes in (1670) in his "Pensees" "There is no other way to know God but through Jesus Christ, in the same manner we don't know ourselves but through Jesus. Again he says "But we can not know Jesus without knowing at the same time God and our own miseries, because Jesus is not only God but the one who restores us from our misery."

So we know who and what we are.

Levi Moreno. Coined a phrase, which I find profoundly meaningful. And it says:

2-"WE ARE WHAT WE ARE DUE TO THE ENCOUNTERS THAT WE HAVE HAD"

- Allow me to use this phrase as a jingle to lead and remind ourselves where we come from, where we are and where we go. And to reflect on some of the encounters that enable us to be bold in speaking about Jesus.

3-"WE ARE WHAT WE ARE"

The first 1st Encounter tells us that

We are sinners due to the encounter with Satan

Genesis.3. 1ff.

- Luther uses the best expression we could think of to describe human sinful condition. Human Being after the fall is "Homo incurvatus in se," and that is not a joke, that is not a physical disability. From this situation no boldness can be expected but a positive and wilful intention of sinning. Because man can not, not sin. Luther did not spare words in teaching and preaching about the deep corruption brought by man into world by sinning. Read Luther's commentary on Genesis and you will understand the pervasive effect of that first act of disobedience. Adam and Eve not only lost that direct understanding of God which they enjoy by living in the garden of Eden, but the nature itself grew aggressive against them and even the sun: says Luther, did not shine as bright as it used to anymore.
- How a simple almost innocent act of disobedience could bring such a curse. Spiritual death and blindness, physical pain suffering and death, and persistent enmity against God. Just to mention a few of the consequences.
- This was our first dreadful encounter and we do live out this reality every moment and day of our lives. Know yourself, who wants to know that, there is no need for boldness for this. Oh yes there is. We need to be fearless to say someone he is a sinner and that he will die for this reason. We need the same boldness both to declare sin as to announce grace.

4-"WE ARE WHAT WE ARE"

The 2nd Encounter

The promise was given to us. Genesis 3.15

- We read in Genesis that right after the act of disobedience and the discovery of the new condition, Adam and Eve stand before God and hear about the consequences of such disobedience. The curse is pronounced both to Adam and Eve, and both hear the

curse God brings upon the serpent. The difference between the curse to Satan and to man is not just one of degree. But also in terms of hope to be freed from it.

- Satan's fate is definite. The Seed that will be born from the woman will crush the head of the serpent. However Satan will be a constant seducer for the rest of his time before last judgement.
- Man's hope for restoration is directly bound to Satan's defeat on one hand. Luther's says in his commentary on Genesis 3. 15. Adam and Eve understood this text as promise and hope: "Their consolation against sin and despair was their hope for this crushing which was to be brought about in the future through Christ. And though the hope based on this promise they will also rise up to eternal life on the Last Day." AE. I, 191.
- On the other hand man's hope will be bound to faith. What once was crystal clear now is blurred, actually is hidden.
- Walking by faith will become the way man will pass through this world to be brought again to the presence of God in eternity.
- In Hebrews 11:1 we read: NKJ "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen". [u'po, stasij(pragma, twn] As we continue to read each verse starts with the phrase "by faith" concluding in verse 39 "And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise".
- Man will walk by faith, as God wants to bring the fulfillment of the promise bound to faith. Promise and faith belong together. Because faith without the promise is useless.
- This promise, which is very clear, is at the same time very indefinite, says Luther. Only as time passes new elements of certainty will be added to it but in order to be faith it will have to remain uncertain. Uncertain in relation to time concrete in regard to what we trust in.
- These two encounters are decisive for every human being, as it is for every theologian to understand them in order to preach and teach properly. Creation and Redemption were key clues in Luther's theology of the cross.

5-"WE ARE WHAT WE ARE"

Our 3rd Encounter

Take off your sandals. I have seen the misery of my people. I AM WHO I AM Exodus 3.1-10

- We all know very well Moses story as an Egyptian in the pharaoh's court. And How God rescued him from a secure death when every boy born in a Jewish family should be killed.
- Run away from Egypt after killing an Egyptian in

defence of one of his fellow Jewish brothers, Moses is called back to be God's messenger to lead Israel out the land of slavery to the promise Land.

- As God reveals to him in the burning bush, we see no strength, courage or boldness in Moses but fear and cowardice.
- Boldness in this man appears to have been vanished long time ago. He is just to scare. He says is not talkative. In sum he is not willing to take the risk and go on behalf of God in front of Pharaoh.
- But God's grace shows through him in many ways from that moment on. The pharaoh is Satan hindering the people of God from reaching the land he prepared for them. Moses is the chosen instrument to speak up for God both to the pharaoh as well as to the Jewish nation in Egypt.
- God would provide with all the means and resources Moses will need in his position. A closer look at this saint and sinner life makes evident that only God was supporting him along the way. Boldness grew in him as God brought to his presence again and again revealing his will for his people.
- Moses as the lawgiver marks a peak in the history of revelation. Moses prepares and instructs the people of God in the law which is given to them in order to remain faithful as they walk in faith and wait the fulfilment of the promise. He himself is considered the prophet, the antitype of Jesus prophetic ministry.
- Boldness and fearfulness is what they are called to show to the nations around them as they proceed to occupy the land, because the Lord Almighty was with them. The Lord The One, and The Only. I AM WHO I AM. This the most conclusive affirmation of the uniqueness of God.

6-"WE ARE WHAT WE ARE"

4th Encounter

What are you doing here Elijah? I have been very zealous (zeles) for the Lord Almighty. Go back there is work to be done. 1 Kings 19. 1-18

- Our next witness is Elijah a strong apparently fearless man that fought his last battle against Jezebel the wicked spouse of Ahab the King of Israel.
- After the slaughtering of the prophets of Baal and the menace of Jezebel to do the same with him, Elijah lost his energy, his courage and panicking he run for his life.
- Don't you know that it is in this time that I am showing my people and the Nations that the Lord is faithful even when my chosen people are not?
- All of a sudden his boldness vanished like smoke in the sky. What happened Elijah after all what you experienced in your life? Did you not taste the goodness of the Lord as he kept you alive in the desert? What about the miracles you performed in

the name of Iahwe, Lord of Israel? What are you doing out here? I need you there.

- Elijah's does the best he can do to respond and justify himself before God. He said: "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life." How could I be bold? I am depressed just leave me alone.
- Once more the Lord comforts Elijah with his presence. The word of God is brought to the very life of Elijah. He could not see or understand the plans of God. He could only see what his eyes and ears could grasp. But the Lord was doing things his own way.
- Go back there is work to be done. V. 18 "I still have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." "Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place.
- In other words Elijah had to learn that the work was not his, God was carrying out his mission his own way.
- Elijah went and did as the Lord said to him and still served the Lord many years until he was taken up by a whirlwind into heaven.

8 "WE ARE WHAT WE ARE"

5th Encounter

Simeon took Jesus in his arms. For my eyes have seen your salvation. A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles. Luke 2. 25-32

- Let us encounter Simeon at the Temple. This man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation[**para,klhsin**] of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.
- He was waiting in faith the fulfillment of the promise made to Adam and Eve, reaffirmed throughout the time by the prophets. Only a handful at that time was still expecting the fulfillment of the promise. To Many bad things had happened, exile, invasion, destruction, different empires taking captives and ruling over them for centuries.
- So faith in the promise could only exist in people like Simeon in whom the Holy Spirit worked with wondrous love. He seemed to be a meek, humble person.
- There seem to be not much of boldness in Simeon's witness. However his boldness showed up in many years of patience and faithfulness. Probably suffering as many denied and even rejected the Lord for not responding to their cry. His boldness is the one we can see in many aging people today who faithfully

witness to their Lord even when their own family turn their back on Jesus and deny the faith.

- The words Simeon pronounce were not easy to the ears of many. He said: "This *Child* is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel".
- Simeon could see further than a simple child being brought to the Temple. He saw in this child the revelation of God. The incarnate word. He could not explain to Anselm "Cur Deus homo" how come God is man? He did not answer the relation of the two natures in Christ. But he knew this was God coming to the world to fulfill his promise and now the final battle against Satan was about to happen.
- Only Faith can see what God conceals, for our own good, in the seeming weakness of the child of Bethlehem.
- This encounter of Simeon is our encounter with Jesus as he comes to us in flesh taking our very nature except in sin.

9 "WE ARE WHAT WE ARE"

6th Encounter

Why have you forsaken me? It is finished. Into your hands I commit my spirit. Mathew 27. 45-55

- Our next encounter is the most important. God reveals himself in the cross of Christ. The scandal of the cross is God doing justice with himself on behalf of the world.
- When Luther came to the point of understanding what Isaiah 45.15 meant, "Truly you are a hidden God" then and only then he understood the meaning of the cross as revelation of God.
- That is why Luther loved to talk about the manger and the cross as the two main masks of God. God is concealed in the cross and the manger in order to reveal himself to us. Luther says that the "Deus absconditus is the Deus revelatus".
- Jesus hanging at the cross is the living witness of what sin brought into world. At the same time is the proof of the justice of God manifest in condemning Christ in our place as the law required to. Forgiveness comes by the bloodshed of a pure lamb. Jesus fulfilled the law, took our place before God under the law, and so died according the same law. Divine justice strikes against human justice, but supersedes it in perfection. Human justice belongs here in earth, while Divine justice is before God. Redemption of human nature required the second.
- The cross of Christ is the place we need to be brought in order to taste the sweetness and goodness of the God. The cross was the theme Jesus mentioned three times to his disciple, but they never wanted to talk about it, actually they had no idea of what was going to happen to him. But later the cross became one of the focal points of their preaching. We preach

Christ and him crucified.

- Finally the cross is the source of all theology, of all Christian life and of all witnessing. In the same manner as theology is not based on nature (glory) but on the revelation (the cross) in the same manner the Christian life is anchored in the cross of Christ, and so is Boldness to witness Jesus, it is not natural but it comes from God. Alister McGrath: "The theology of the cross is a theology of hope to those who despair. (p.181) Luther's theology of the cross. H. Sasse: "the cross demands faith contrary to what our eyes see. (p.50) We Confess.

10-"WE ARE WHAT WE ARE"

7th Encounter

He is not here. Go instead and tell them. He is risen. John 20. 1-18

- For sure none of us would have like to be in the place of the disciples in this two encounters, the cross and the empty tomb. These two places were the big disappointments of Peter. But soon after he took pride in both of them to the point of giving his own life for his Lord and Saviour.
- The confirmation of the resurrection of Jesus brought fear and confusion to the disciples. They were still a bunch of frightened coward followers of a master who did everything well except for letting them (the Jews) to hang him on the cross. These men gave up everything in their lives to follow him. Work, business, family, and now what? They were simple people, just one or two of them had some education, and for the most part they were uneducated.
- The resurrection of Jesus not only confirmed that Jesus was the Son of God but also the effectiveness and acceptance of his sacrifice on our behalf. He is not here; we will not remain there either. Christus Victor is our own victory over death sin and Satan.
- The resurrection of Jesus gave the base for the first confession of the church namely "Kirios Iesus Christos" "Jesus Christ is Lord" . This was the standard confession of faith off all believers.
- Paul says in Rom 10.9. "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved".
- The Resurrection of Jesus is at the heart of the apostolic preaching. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is in the end the proof that the Christian church is the church of God. It is the test against false prophets and religions.

11-"WE ARE WHAT WE ARE"

8th Encounter

You will receive power. You will be my witnesses unto the end of the earth. Acts 1. 8-11

- Witnessing is not an easy task, it is not natural,

therefore does happen naturally.

- Boldness in witnessing grows out of the inner/outer assurance of what we are and what we have been made of in our life. Boldness grows out of the word of repentance and absolution in which we are renewed. Boldness will grow out of the loving approach of Jesus to us.
- Boldness starts at the foot of the cross and walks out thorough the empty tomb.
- The disbanded disciples needed to be reassured of this. The fact that they would carry on the ministry of reconciliation did not mean they were, the source the means and the power. They were just the instruments. And so are we.
- The resurrected One comes to the disciples and restores their broken spirit. We read in John 20.26: And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!"
- Again in chapter 21. So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs." 16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep."
- Jesus instructs the disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they are empowered by the Holy Spirit. You will receive power. Boldness will be given to you. I assure you will not lack the power. As well as my servants in the past (the ones we encountered) so you will have the Holy Spirit so that as instruments of the Lord you will not be of anything.
- I will come to you constantly in the word and the sacraments. I dwell and I want to come to you there. Mystical experiences might be fun, written programs might talk of magnificent results, but don't search for boldness there.
- The book of Acts tells us about the secret of the first Christian boldness. In Chapter 2.v. 46 "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved"
- The word dwelt among them, and so they were bold. All were simple common people, doing there daily duties, being obedient to their vocation, and so God was doing His mission through them.
- They were not architects, they were just instruments. And so the church of God grew and grew as time

passed. They were gone, and new servants came and served, and are gone, and now we are here and we will be gone and God still will do His mission, through His Word by means of His servants.

12-“WE ARE WHAT WE ARE”

9th Encounter

But us for you continue in what you have learned. Remember. Time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. 2 Timothy 3.10 - 4.5

- Our essence as Christians, new creatures born in Christ through baptism is never at rest, while we are in this fallen world.
- The challenges we face are constant. Satan is never at rest, though he has been defeated at the cross. That is why we are not at rest either. We are called to watch, and as we watch share the Word with boldness.
- Paul’s admonition to Timothy appears to be more than appropriate in our days.
- Sound doctrine is not fashion; actually it is bothering to many. People don’t put up sound doctrine, and Paul was not thinking about a Corpus Doctrinae, or an accepted dogmatic; He was talking about “believing in Christ crucified and resurrected for our salvation.”
- Now as well in ancient times the cross is a scandal.
- People want soft easy theology. Myths are better because there is just fairy tales behind them, they don’t require a commitment. Post-modern spirituality is filled with that.
- Post-modern spirituality is theology of Glory hundred percent. What eyes see in nature is what people worship. Once again as it always has been, the spirituality of the cross and the spirituality of the glory are in conflict.
- The Spirit of the time does not like the boldness of the cross.
- The Spirit of the time wants an easygoing life. People today are light-minded, suffering is out of the consideration, and ethics is just a personal recipe.
- How hard is to be bold in this days, Moses was right, he didn’t want to go. So was Elijah, who wouldn’t get tired fighting alone against evil forces? What is so bad about acting like the disciples who run away

thinking his master was defeated?

- But the Lord, as he said to Moses. Elijah. The disciples and to many other servants still says: I am with you always, I am the owner of the vineyard, I do the work, I do send my Spirit to you, I will keep you steadfast through my word and the sacraments. Go for them, live by them. And boldness will be a lifestyle.

13-WITH BOLDNESS... For what we are

- 1 We are children of God.
- 2 We are his people.
- 3 We are his instruments
- 4 We are the living prove of God’s love.

14-WE ARE THE CHURCH

The People of God

- 5 We are a church with the Gospel of Jesus
- 6 We are a church a church with a confession
- 7 We are a missionary church
- 8 We are a church with history
- 9 We are a blessed church
- 10 We are a church with problems
- 11 We are a loving and caring church
- 12 This is the church I love.

Therefore brothers and sisters, let’s walk in faith according to our calling witnessing

15- WITH BOLDNESS...

For what we are

Boldness grows as we are challenged in what we are. Boldness grows as we go on in our lives fulfilling our vocation. Because it is here where God continues his work of creation (new life), preservation, and redemption.

16-WITH BOLDNESS...

For we are his disciples

We are the chosen ones,

We have the gospel of salvation

17- WITH BOLDNESS...

That all may know His Name

JESUS is Lord