



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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Last Sunday of the Church Year

November 25, 2018

“Regrets”

(1 Corinthians 15:9-10)

Rev. David K. Groth

“For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me” (1 Cor. 15:9-10).

**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

Collect: Lord Jesus Christ, so govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that, ever mindful of Your glorious return, we may persevere in both faith and holiness of living; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

I like golf. The time outside, the time spent with friends, the competitive banter along the way. I like golf. However, there *is* something I also hate about golf. I hate that one or two bad holes on the front nine can ruin the score for the entire round. For me that usually begins with an errant drive off the tee box. A bad drive forces you to play the second shot from behind a tree or out of the deep rough. The thing snowballs; one errant shot leads to another. Play as well as you might on the back nine it's hard to recover from one or two really bad holes on the front. Even if you do play really well for the rest of the round, you still think, "If only I stayed on the fairway back there, then I would really have come in with a good score!"

One reason my brother Andy is a much better golfer than I am is because he navigates the course carefully. He'll pull out a short iron and lay up in front of the hazards. I'm thinking to myself "I didn't come here to knit," and pull out my driver and promptly knock one into the woods where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth and many regrets.

It's occurred to me I'm now playing the back nine of life. There are fewer years ahead of me than behind. That is, I'm somewhere on the downward slope of life. Some of you are way back there on the third or fourth hole. Don't be smug about it. Your time is coming quicker than you think. But most of us in this room are working our way through the back nine. Hate to say it, some are getting pretty close to the clubhouse.

In any event, do you wish you could go back to the front and have another crack at a couple of those errant drives? Do you wish you could have a couple of do-overs? Do you have any regrets about how you played the first nine of life? I do. There are a lot of things I wouldn't change, but there have also been some cringe-worthy moments when I played poorly, recklessly. I didn't

pay enough attention to the hazards, was a little too confident I could just fly over them. Or through them. Golfers like to say a tree is ninety percent air and therefore it often works to just blast right through it. That's a myth. It doesn't work. You have to respect and navigate the hazards.

Do you have any regrets? The one who says he doesn't is either lying, or pretending, or just not thinking very carefully. I'm sure all of you would like to do some things differently if you could. But you can't. You can't go back and have a do-over. Nor can you scrub up your scorecard prior to turning it in. I never thought I'd say it, but your scorecard? "It is what it is!"

Everybody has regrets. St. Paul certainly did. He articulates his greatest regret in our text: "I am the least of the apostles" he writes, "unworthy even to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God" (v. 9).

Judas had regrets. Remember how he tried to return the 30 pieces of silver. But the chief priests had no mercy, no forgiveness for him. He should have fled to Jesus, who would have covered him over with love and forgiveness. Instead, Judas took matters into his own hands, trying in vain to atone for his own sin.

Peter certainly had some cringe-worthy moments. My guess is for the duration of his life every time he heard a rooster crow it made him wince.

Thomas had regrets. He probably wanted to spit on himself for having doubted the Lord's resurrection.

Every thoughtful Christian has regrets, so I'm sure you do too. You cannot change history, so what can you do?

Some beat themselves up and carry around a load of guilt. Others try to make up for the blunders and work harder at being good. At a subconscious level some might tell themselves they are no longer allowed to enjoy life, and not worthy of any honor. I bet there are quite a few in this room that still feel guilty and stupid about something that happened years ago, maybe two, twenty, or even fifty. You tell yourself, it's all in the past. You tell yourself life goes on. You tell yourself nobody's perfect. You tell yourself

nobody cares anymore. But the crackling of your conscience doesn't quiet down. And besides we have an enemy who loves to remind us of our sin, loves to accuse, an enemy who will try to convince us we're sham Christians, nothing more than master pretenders.

Thanks be to God in Jesus Christ, who did not leave us in our sin and shame, nor does he want us to stay there. With his forgiveness he lifts us up out of the pit. Listen to his promises. They are not just for others. They are for you. 1 Jn 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Psalm 103, "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us" (v. 12). Can anything be further apart than the east is from the west?

And there's another promise that applies here too. It's from Romans 8: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called to his purpose." Paul wrote that, and I suspect he's thinking about his own life too. "All things work together for good." That is, God can use not just our strengths, not just our talents. He can also use our regrets, the things of which we are most ashamed. God can use even those.

Again, think about Paul. He had persecuted the church. He was there nodding with approval while Stephen was being stoned. He put Christians behind bars, separating families and causing financial ruin. He hunted them down relentlessly. That's why, later, Paul wrote, "I am the least of the apostles, unworthy even to be called an apostle. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me."

God's grace lifted Paul up out of the mire of sin and shame, washed him clean and actually used him more powerfully than any other for the sake of the Gospel. Paul's background, (good, bad and ugly), was part of who he was, and God did not shrink from it. It did not disqualify Paul. In fact, it made him uniquely qualified. God could have chosen

anyone, but he chose Paul not in spite of his history, but precisely because of it.

Moreover, Paul teaches us how to deal with our own regrets. Left unchecked, they could wreck us and make us useless to God or anyone else. In Philippians 3 Paul writes, “Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (v. 13). “Forgetting what is behind . . .” That is, don’t let your sin, which God has forgiven, tear you down. And don’t you build up an artificial barrier between you and God with your regrets. Your regrets are part of your history, but they don’t need to define who you are. You are first and foremost a redeemed, baptized child of God. Moreover, God has promised you, “I will remember your sins no more.” So there’s no reason to crucify yourself for all your regrets. No, with Paul we look to the crucified Lord for forgiveness and salvation. We look to him, and not to ourselves.

See the good that can come out of our regrets? See how God can use our regrets to keep driving us back to himself? If we didn’t have regrets, we might get it into our heads that we don’t really need a Savior. But our regrets have a way of tearing down pretenses and driving us back to Christ for real forgiveness and assurance.

What else can God do with our regrets? Will Rogers once said, “Good judgment comes with experience, and a lot of that comes from bad judgment.” We learn from our regrets.

Using the golf image, they make us a little more careful and wise while navigating the course.

Our regrets also make us a little more patient with others who are struggling. Golfers, you know what I’m talking about . . . when you spend more time looking for your partner’s errant ball than you do sizing up your own. But every golfer has been there. Every golfer knows what it’s like to have the wheels fall off in spectacular fashion.

Hopefully, our regrets make us a little less judgmental when others are struggling, a little more patient,

a little more understanding and quick to forgive. 2
Corinthians 1, “Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord
Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,
who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able
to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort
with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (vv. 3-4).
Our regrets make us better as Christian friends.

One last thing: For most of us, golf really isn't about
coming into the clubhouse with the best possible score
(maybe for a few who are trying to make a living that way,
but not for the rest of us). Similarly, our ultimate goal in life
is not to come before God with the best possible score. I
don't think any one of us is in the position to be proudly
waving a score card before the judgment throne of God.
Don't point to your score card. Point to Christ. Point to his
blood which has cleansed us of our sin. If we did well in
parts of life, we thank God. If we failed in other places, we
thank God for his patience and forgiveness and instruction.
In any case, we cast all our chips on him and rest ourselves
in him, and resolve to let him use us according to his will.

He can use all of what makes you who you are. He
can use all of your history, not just the good parts but the bad
parts too, the painful, shameful memories, the cringe worthy
moments . . . he can use all of it like he did with Paul and
Peter and Thomas and so many others.

Your regrets, though regretful, are an important part
of who you are. They inform your present. They have
taught you to respect the hazards. They make you more
patient and forgiving with others. And they keep driving you
back to Christ for hope. God can use all of that, wants to use
all of that, will use all of that. Paul has assured us of the
same: “For those who love God all things work together for
good.” Thanks be to God. Amen.

