

Being Found in Him

A Sermon by *the Rev. Dr. Joseph David Stinson*,
Glen Ridge Congregational Church, Glen Ridge, New Jersey,
Preached on the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, (2October), 2011.

Text: Philippians 3:7

“What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.” ~St. Paul

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Faultless, yikes! A great record of achievement and, apparently, something Paul was proud of. He never denigrated his Jewishness. Yet he told them, something—*someone*—far surpassing all he ever knew in his Pharisaic Judaism had turned his head and his life around. When people came teaching the church in Philippi that they had to follow the rituals of Judaism *and* Jesus to

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be disciples, Paul was direct. “I’ve been down that road and it doesn’t work. Every time you try to add something to the grace of Christ, the things you add change grace to something else.” He told them he could match his accomplishments as the Torah counts them with all comers. He was proud of his Judaism but the surpassing worth of the grace of Christ had put everything in a new perspective for him. If you try to use your Torah observance as a plus-up for Christianity you have missed something.³

Paul said this about a particular conflict in the ancient church. But we have our own plus factors we tack onto our Christianity. To us, too, Paul says don’t look elsewhere for something to achieve or do to complete your discipleship. Politics is the common plus factor today. Religious folks on the right and left get confused and think political opinions are how you live out your faith more fully. Especially when you start putting confidence in political opinions over and above the grace of Jesus, you head for trouble. Paul said, these are important but they are an entirely different category from faith. Indeed, he taught, I count all of that as loss compared to the unsurpassable gain of knowing Christ and being found in him.⁴ In my past life, Paul said, the things which he formerly considered gains now seem less important and certainly were no longer the foundation of his present life. Christ was found in human form,⁵ and now Paul was found in Christ.⁶ I think the metaphor here is of someone wandering, looking, not sure, but now *found*. To not recognize the free gift of grace as just that is to miss the gospel. “Grace plus anything cancels grace.”⁷ This does not denigrate our other allegiances: patriotism, family, career, moral codes, any of the many things we try to *plus up* with Jesus. These things have a proper place in a disciple’s life, but only One can be on top. The others find their rightful places in life—indeed they are often sweeter when they take their correct places—when we put Jesus first.

Paul used a phrase *knowing Christ* in the climax of this section of the letter:

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection of the dead.⁸

What did he mean by *knowing Christ*? Is it an intellectual thing? No, although there are things about Christ that we know and learn in that sense. It is more knowing as when we say, I *know this person*. It is a relational and personal kind of knowing.⁹ For Paul in knowing Jesus, the primary focus was never the past, but rather the future. “Forgetting,” he wrote, “what is behind

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We are taught to strive for an advantage over others. But Christianity is not that way. Christ has already gained every advantage for us. What is asked of us is belief, faith, and being willing to press onto the prize of being found in Christ Jesus. “*Come to me,*” he told his would-be disciples, “all you who are overburdened and I will give you rest.” Paul, speaking to himself, but hoping we will overhear him and follow him, said:

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There is nothing one can add to what Christ has done for us so as to gain an advantage over others. It doesn’t work that way. Grace is a gift. One accepts it and gains what it gives—something eternal, imperishable, more precious than gold. Everything else is important but not that important.

Press on toward the real prize—knowing Christ and being found in him.

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Being Found in Him. DOC

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