

Do All the Good You Can
By All the Means You Can
In All the Ways You Can
In All the Places You Can
At All the Times You Can

It is good to read familiar passages of scripture over and again because each time a particular phrase might capture our attention and feed our spirit. As you heard our reading from Paul's letter to the Corinthians was there a particular phrase in the passage that spoke to your heart. If so, I invite you to meditate on it this week and see how God might be speaking to you. The phrase that caught my attention was "So we are always confident..." Confidence, where do we obtain it and how might we use it? That question dovetails well with my reflections on Father's Day this weekend.

On this Father's Day weekend I would like to note one of the reasons I like golfing with my father. As a child and youth I would golf with him a couple times a week together. When I lived in Chicago for twenty years we would golf a couple of times whenever I was back in town. Since my return to Omaha we probably golf a couple times a month. Over the years as we golfed I enjoyed the time together and the fact that he was always confident on the golf course, as he was in the rest of his life. In addition, I would also like to say that one of the reasons my Dad drove me crazy when we would golf and he was my opponent even if I was not his opponent was the fact that he was always confident. When I was a child, teen, young adult as well as a fully blossomed adult my Dad was always a better golfer than me. Now I was a good golfer but he happened to be a real good golfer.

I remember the following scenario coming to pass more often than I want to remember. I had him in my sights on a particular hole, in fact, I had him dead to rights, or so I thought. Maybe my second shot would be on the green with my ball just 5 to 6 feet from the hole while he misfired his second shot and was off the green by 15 yards.

Now if I drop my putt I would win the hole and if I had two putts I would tie the hole, at worse. Where I see disaster unfolding for him he only saw the opportunity to wring out whatever hope I maintained of beating him. Then he would promptly chip his ball on the green and I would watch in horror as it rolled towards the cup until it finally dropped in. He got his birdie 3 from off the green and then ... I would promptly miss my putt as I settled for a par 4, defeated and muttering vulgarities under my breath to his utter delight. Begrudgingly I say, "Happy Father's Day!"

Yet golfing with Dad was a life lesson in maintaining confidence no matter the circumstance that one found oneself. Hitting a bad shot was not a reason for anger or disappointment but it was an opportunity to pull off a great recovery shot. That is a great lesson for the golf course and for life itself. One reason we can have confidence in the midst of difficult circumstances is

because such a behavior/attitude has been modeled for us by significant folk in our lives. Certainly there are other sources for confident living. One source we find in our letter lesson.

Paul has a secret for confidence as he declares in our letter lesson, “So we are always confident...” When Paul says, “So we are always confident...” Paul is talking about having confidence when he walked into a town that he has never visited and proclaims the Good News to people who had never heard of Jesus before.

When Paul says, “So we are always confident...” Paul is also talking about having confidence when he finds himself sitting in jail after being beaten because of his work on behalf of Christ, which happened frequently. Paul has confidence in good times and bad. Therefore, Paul was able to do all the good he could do at all the times he might do it.

Where does this confidence of Paul come from? No doubt it has been modeled for Paul in his developmental years much like my Dad modeled confidence for me on and off the golf course. In addition to such modeling there is another source for his ongoing confidence that he speaks of in verse 7 of our lesson, it’s “walking by faith” which is “second sight.”

For we walk by faith

We talked about living life with “second sight” in my message two weeks ago. “Second sight” is not what we see with our eyes but what we see as we walk by faith. “Second sight,” which is faith-based and qualitatively superior to present reality, enables us to be confident. In the book of Exodus Pharaoh saw the Israelites as the people who would serve as his slaves but Moses maintained a “second sight” which envisioned the Israelites as a free people and therefore with faith he confidently led the Exodus. In I Samuel the army of Saul saw an enemy that was too powerful for anyone to defeat whereas David, who walked by faith, maintained a “second sight” as he looked Goliath and thought “the bigger they are, the harder they fall.”

Folk throughout the neighborhood only saw a pregnant teenage girl who nabbed a guy gullible enough to hook up with her. But Mary, who walked by faith, maintained a “second sight” as she considered her pregnancy and with confidence gave birth to a child she knew God would richly bless. Paul maintained “second sight” as he knew that the God he served was more powerful than the beating he absorbed and jail cells he found himself in. In faith, Paul knew that God who raised Jesus from the dead was by his side during the beatings and in the jail cell. That resurrection perspective enabled Paul to maintain a “second sight” that filled him with confidence. “Second sight” supersedes present circumstances so we can...

Do all the good we can,
At all the times we can.

...away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Furthermore, verse 8 notes that Paul’s faith-filled confidence present in every circumstance that he encountered also has an eternal feature to it. He states, “Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. We hear oftentimes this yearning to be present with the resurrected Christ in heaven from Paul in the various letters in the New Testament that he penned. He is confident Christ is in heaven and all followers of Jesus will join Him there. He wants us to be confident as well.

Paul clearly sees being present in heaven as a superior location to being present on earth. Please remember why Paul had such supreme confidence in Christ and in heaven. It is found in the 9th chapter of the book of Acts. He reports that he has an eye to eye encounter with the resurrected Jesus. Jesus, the resurrected one, gives him a new course in life. An eye to eye conversation with the resurrected Jesus provides one with confidence for now and for eternity. On the weekend of July 7/8 our lesson will come from the opening verses of the 12th chapter of II Corinthians where Paul talks about when he “was caught up into Paradise” and heard “heavenly things.” Such an experience will provide one with confidence now and in heaven. As disciples of Jesus we are invited to also have supreme confidence in our place in heaven as well as in our activities here on earth.

“...we make it our aim to please Christ”

Yet, how are we to be confident that we are doing that which is the best? The answer to that is found in verse 9 where Paul writes “So whether we are in heaven or on earth, we make it our aim to please Christ.” Pleasing Christ is doing all the good we can at all the times we can and doing so with confidence. A couple of weeks ago Marjorie said that we need to get LED lights for every light fixture in our home. I told her we mostly have energy efficient light bulbs now. She agreed but told me that the new LED lights are much more efficient than what we currently have.

I asked if it wouldn't be better to wait for our current “energy efficient” although not “most energy efficient” bulbs to burn out and then replace them with LED lights. “Nope,” she said. She told me if she was going to do all the good she can do for the environment that now was the time to get LED lights. I told her I thought throwing out our present light bulbs seemed wasteful. “Oh no,” she told me, “we will give those light bulbs to the Tip-Top and someone can purchase them for a cheap price and use them in their home which will probably be an upgrade from the regular light bulbs they are currently using.” Well, how could I say no? We now have LED light bulbs throughout our home and a customer at Tip-top is getting some energy efficient (if not top of the line) light bulbs for their home. Marjorie is confident that this win/win action is pleasing to Christ as it is good for Mother Earth. She may be right!

Paul was confident in all circumstances he found himself in because he knew he was aiming to please Christ. How might we live with faith, live with confidence and live in a way that pleases Christ? It is by doing all the good we can do at this time or phase of our lives.

This Father's Day I will have the pleasure of spending the afternoon with my father and mother. Dad, who is now 87 years old, can still play golf and play it very well for a man who is 87. He can still hit down the middle of the fairway although not as long as he used to hit it. He still has a good short game and can chip in it. In fact, a few years ago he made his fourth hole-in-one of his golfing career. It was a 157 yard shot on the 8th hole at Pacific Springs golf course. Yet, Dad hasn't golfed in the last two years since my mother has had health issues. He stays home with her and with cares for her needs as they enjoy their time together. On the golf course he taught me the lesson of maintaining confidence in all circumstances. Off the golf course he is teaching me (the pastor) about love and care. That's doing all the good you can at all the times you can do it. With love and gratitude, I say, “Happy Father's Day!”