

3:12-21
Phillipians ~~5:12-21~~ 20th Sunday after Pentecost Oct. 21, 1990

I was traveling to Columbus on I-71. Off to the right I noticed some trees broken off five feet from the ground. I searched with my eyes to see more trees broken, a pattern of trees broken one after another. A tornado had passed through that valley recently, though I had not seen the tornado, its power and effect were evident. A path of destruction was witness to the funnel cloud that had passed that way.

No one has ever seen God, the only Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known. So we read in the beginning of the gospel according to John.

I haven't seen God. I have not seen Jesus Christ. I have never received a message from them like an invisible hand writing on the wall, or a voice that speaks out of the darkness. My experience of God is much like my experience of that tornado. I witness his power and effect in the words and life of others.

For me, the one in whom I see most clearly that power ~~and~~ ^{and} effect is the one whom we know as St. Paul.

Before he met Christ his name was Saul. In the world of Pharisees he was a superstar. He had been trained by Gamaliel, the great Rabbi of that day. He was at the forefront of the battle against what his people knew as the Christian heresy. He was a man with a great future ahead of him, as a Pharisee he was convinced that he had an eternal future ahead of him through daily applying himself to keeping the law that the Almighty God had give to his people.

Then suddely where there had been this tall and proud Jewish tree, there was nothing, not even a stump. In a moment of time he was convinced to leave it all behind.

He saw Jesus, the resurrected Jesus. The glorified Jesus. He was blinded by that glory. He was struck to the ground by the power of the voice that demanded, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me.

In all the writings of ^{St.} Paul that God has chosen to preserve for us, we never read a description of the glory that he saw. We are not able to see Jesus through Paul's eyes. But we see the power and effect of that moment in the one Jesus renamed Paul.

In the second letter to the Corinthians we read what Paul was glad to endure on behalf of that Lord he met on the Damascus road. Countless beatings, imprisonments, often near death. Five times he received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times he was beaten with rods, once stoned, Three times ship wrecked, a night and a day adrift at sea, in danger most everywhere he went. The one whom he had met on that road led him to write to the Phillipians: Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible, I may attain the resurrection of the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Bretheren I do not consider that I have made it my own but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call in Christ Jesus.

Then Paul says to us, "Let those who are mature be thus minded.

Thus minded. Letting one thing matter in our lives, gaining the resurrection of the dead. Letting one Lord Jesus Christ matter, counting everything else as refuse, trash. Forgetting what lies behind, our sin, our accomplishments, and fixing our hearts and minds only on what lies ahead, our Lord Jesus Christ. To this Paul invites us.

If we receive that invitation, then our lives too will show the power and the effect of Christ. A tornado will have passed through the valley that is us, uprooting what is worthless, yet also planting what is precious.

I haven't seen Christ face to face as yet. But Paul who has wants me and you to know that belonging to the one he has seen, is worth everything.

Therefore, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward calling
Christ Jesus. Amen.