

**Philippians 3:4-14** If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. <sup>7</sup> Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. <sup>8</sup> More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ,<sup>1</sup> the righteousness from God based on faith. <sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ<sup>1</sup> and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. <sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal;<sup>1</sup> but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup> Beloved,<sup>1</sup> I do not consider that I have made it my own;<sup>2</sup> but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly<sup>1</sup> call of God in Christ Jesus.

### “Profit and Loss”

Profit and loss...the bottom line...could this possibly be the sole determinant of worth and success in our world driven by Mammon. I would ask that you take what I say for the next few minutes as Randy on the comedy channel trying to demonstrate his command of sarcasm. Well, it would seem that the very survival of our world seems to have a direct correlation to the bottom line of certain global mega-corporate-conglomerates. By this I mean the handful of corporations that own all the other corporations and make their profits by buying and selling corporations. If the bottom line of these global MCC's is in the red showing loss; people loose their jobs, interests rates plummet, the cost of living rises, debt rises, wars erupt. It literally becomes a bloody mess and no wonder the colour red is the one we use for showing a loss on the bottom line.

Conversely, if the MCC's show a profit or are in the black; people still loose their jobs as the corporations find ways to increase productivity and deliver more profits to their stockholders. The cost of living still goes up as the basic commodities and the retail sectors go for their share of the pie. Interest rates go up as the banks also go for their share a move which generally serves to stagnate economic growth and inflation. Debt still increases as capital ventures get going and people take on mortgages and buy lots of new stuff as a badge to their deluded sense of success and the false belief taht they'll actually get it all paid off one day. Wars still erupt as governments who are elected by special interests who are owned by the mega-corporate-conglomerates are co-opted to use their militaries to settle old scores between the MCC's and steal new sources of resources. To be in the black is to be literally in the darkness of human greed.

Well that's the grand scale of the world, the macro version. If the church is to be God's alternative community to this way of doing things how do we measure results. Well each year our national office sends out a form asking us

to send in our numbers in finances, membership, and attendance. They never ask whether we have grown in knowing Christ, the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings. I assume that they assume this is happening and the results will show on the bottom line. What else am I to assume.

What about us as individuals, here at the micro level. What's the bottom line? And remember, I ask this to a group of people in which we call ourselves Christians. This means we have been called to be God's alternative to the world, the enfleshment of God's future hope for his Creation? What about us? How do we measure the bottom line? By bank rolls or accomplishments or having come from good families and we've managed to pass that good name on to another generation? Or by a sense of "I've made a difference with my life"?

Well, according to Paul everything we could count as profit or loss on whatever bottom line we have is nothing more than effluent in comparison to knowing Jesus Christ. We look at Paul here and we see a person throwing everything to the septic system: his pedigree, his achievements, his devotional life, and what he believed to be obedience both before and after he became a Christian. Paul was a very religious man. His devotion led him to be the chief Judean persecutor of the church. He was as devout and blameless as he believed he could be, yet what **he** thought was obedience to God was nothing more than accomplice to the murder of Jesus' disciples. Even after he becomes a Christian, and probably the most zealous missionary-evangelist- Bible scholar-theologian who has ever lived, he still looks back on all that he had done for Christ and says I've attained nothing. To Paul the only thing that matters is to keep striving, to keep pursuing the call of Christ in our lives. We don't count anything to our credit. We just keep pressing on in what Jesus is calling us to: the day to day mundane life of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

One of the most pervading faith questions that ministers have to be ready to answer for their parishioners is for guidance in the matter of calling. What has God put me on this earth to do? We know that we can't be like Jesus or like Peter or like Paul or like Mother Teresa. These people are the occasional anomaly to being a disciple. For the most part we are ordinary people who live ordinary lives but our lives are complicated because we have this relationship with God through Christ in the Holy Spirit that just complicates everything. We can't just do what we want and we know we can't. There's this knowing Christ thing that we just can't get away from. Jesus calls us to be different.

In Lent we talk about the wilderness of faith, the thirst of faith. You know...we are stuck here in lives where we're trying to figure it all out and do the best we can yet we're stuck in our own lives which may or may not be good lives and yet we hunger for something else, something more. This is the moment in our lives when we don't ask God to come and fill it up. This is the moment in our lives when we say to God that the only thing that is going to sort me out, if that's possible, is knowing this Jesus who hounds me and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings. This is the time we stop trying to do this being a Christian by our own efforts and that is if we're even trying, this falsely religious stuff of trying to be righteous, because Jesus is righteous for us and the free gift of the Holy Spirit proves it...and I hope you folks know the Holy Spirit

because nothing I say will make sense unless you do. The Holy Spirit makes us to know the love of the Father as Jesus the Son knows it. We are the beloved children of God...to not know this makes your presence here entirely pointless and a waste of your time. If the Holy Spirit is not here communicating to us each, however he sees fit, that we are beloved children to God, then everything we do here is a pointless waste of time, nothing more than trying to be faithful to a God we do not know.

We gather around a table today that spells out the bottom line like nothing else can. Christ crucified, his blood shed so that we may know ourselves, **really** experience ourselves as being beloved children of God and living accordingly. The bottom line is the black of his death and the red of his blood. We are a people, God's people, gathered around a table as a family. This meal is about community, community in Jesus name. We come here laying aside the effluent of our pedigrees, our beliefs, our religion, our false sense of being good people,...anything that might be to our gain, we lay it aside to ask “Lord, how is it that you laid your life aside for us and that you've called us to the vulnerability of actually getting to know and love these people whom you gathered us together with here around your table.?” The Christian faith begins not with some self-righteous trip of trying to be a good person because Jesus died for me. That's the devil's obedience. True obedience is getting to know and love the people you share these pews with and letting this community of love spill over into the community around us. If we do not care about and set a priority of building friendship with the people we worship with, we will never – here me – know the surpassing knowledge of Christ Jesus. We can leave here and try to be good family people, good co-workers, good people with good spiritual awareness, good altruistic community organization people trying to do everything Stephen Lewis says we should do, but if we are not letting ourselves be vulnerable enough to suffer getting to know and love the people we worship with and letting them into our lives to know and love us, then no matter what we might call faith or spirituality is nothing more than a lie meant to distract us from truly getting to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the **fellowship...the fellowship** of his sufferings. Your church family gathered around the Lord's Table here is where the upward call of Christ begins for us. As senseless and unmeaningful, as dry and pointless as this meal often seems, it is as good as it gets! The bottom line in Christ Jesus' kingdom is that profit is loss and loss is profit. Amen.