

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"Soli Deo Gloria"

Scripture: Romans 11:33-36; Psalm 24

Hymns: Praise the Lord with the sound of trumpet 466, Praise him, praise him, all ye little children (insert), All creatures of our God and King 433 (1,4,6) Praise: Garment of praise, Bless the Lord (10,000 reasons), Majesty

November 5, 2017

Rev. Steve Filyk

This coming Saturday is Remembrance Day.

Some will brave the weather and gather at the cenotaph.

Others will watch the ceremonies at Ottawa
from the comfort of their homes.

Most of us will pause sometime this coming weekend

To remember, to honor those people,
who have made great sacrifices for us.

People like Nichola Goddard.

Back in 2006 "Capt. Goddard...
had just made history on the battlefield
in the last hours of a battle with the Taliban...

Supported by her team of three men,

the well-regarded 26-year-old had just executed
high explosive and illumination fire missions
in support of Canadian troop manoeuvres
against a known enemy —

the first time a Canadian soldier

had done so since the Korean War
more than 50 years earlier.

Yet that ['first' would be overshadowed by another 'first'].

A chance ricochet of shrapnel,

striking her in the back of the head and killing her instantly,
put Capt. Goddard in the history books:
she was the **first** combat-certified,

female Canadian soldier to die in a combat role."ⁱ

Next Saturday we will honor people like Capt. Goddard.

Given that this will be my first time at the cenotaph

As the Padre for the Rocky Mountain Rangers,

I asked some of the unit members, combat veterans,
What I should expect.

I won't tell you just what they said:

I can't repeat everything in polite company.

But it was clear that they didn't like the celebrations.

Why not, you ask?

In their view, an event intended to honor veterans
Was hijacked by people who wanted to honor themselves:

Politicians clambering for spots on the platform;

Businessmen laying wreaths emblazoned with their names.

It's funny how good purposes can be subverted and upended.

How opportunities to honor others
Can be turned into opportunities to honor ourselves.

This tendency to want to honor ourselves,

is something I would like you to keep in the back of your minds
As we consider our fifth and final sola:
Soli Deo Gloria—for God's glory alone.

Now if I was to preach on only one Sola,

This one would probably be it.
For it expresses the great and final purpose of our salvation.

Those gifts of Scripture, of faith, of grace, of Jesus Christ

Are given so that we may live out our vocation
To "glorify God, and to enjoy [God] forever."ⁱⁱ

As John Piper has noted,

This Sola a sort of 'continental divide' in theology:

"If you really believe this," he says,
 "all rivers of your thinking run toward God.
 If you do not, all rivers run toward man..."ⁱⁱⁱ

So where do we find the grounds,
 the rationale for this Sola.
 [This may be the first sermon you've heard on it!]

We find it in Scripture...

In our call to worship we were told
 that creation sings the glories of God.
 The implication is that if we are to live
 in line with the grain of the universe
 We will also live to praise God's name.

What is implied by the Psalmist
 Is made explicit in our Epistle lesson, in Paul's doxology:
 "For from him and through him and for him are all things.
 To him be the glory forever! Amen."^{iv}

To God be the glory forever! Amen.

But Scripture doesn't just **tell us** to honor God.
 Scripture **shows us** why God is worthy of this honor.

Earlier in that doxology Paul speaks in wonder
 About God's generosity AND understanding.

*The NIV runs together what other translations
 Do better in separating:*

*That is rather than proclaiming
 the riches OF the wisdom and knowledge of God,
 We might better hear "Oh, the depth of the riches
 AND wisdom and knowledge of God!"^v*

So what raises Paul to such expressive praise?
 From the context of his writing,
 It is clearly the Gospel.

As one commentator has noted:

"For [the eleven preceding] chapters
 Paul has been giving [a] comprehensive account of the gospel.

Step by step he has shown
 how God has revealed his way of putting sinners
 right with himself,

how Christ died for our sins
 and was raised for our justification,
 how we are united with Christ in his death and resurrection,

how the Christian life is lived not under the law
 but in the Spirit,
 and how God plans to incorporate the fullness of Israel
 and of the Gentiles into his new community."^{vi}

In today's doxology Paul takes a breather
 To appreciate this great vista of salvation.
 And it is something that we can appreciate this too.

God's **riches** are indeed evident in this salvation.
 Paul remarks elsewhere that God is exceedingly generous,
 Noting that "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord
shall be saved."^{vii}

God's extraordinary **wisdom** can also be perceived in salvation.
 Paul says of the church at Colossae:

"I want their hearts
 to be encouraged and united in love,
 so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding
 and have the knowledge of God's mystery,
 that is, Christ himself..."^{viii}

Why is Paul so taken by God's riches and wisdom?
 Paul experienced them himself.
 Remember his story?

Paul, then called 'Saul of Tarsus'
 Was a zealous Pharisee
 who after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ
 "swore to wipe out the new Christian church,
 called The Way."^{ix}

As he travelled to Damascus to carry out this inquisition
 He was knocked off his donkey and blinded.

Then the crucified and resurrected Jesus
 spoke to him, spoke to him audibly, telling him where to go,
 so that he might be healed.

Sometime later "Something like scales fell from Saul's eyes,
 and he could see again.

He arose and was baptized into the Christian faith."^x
 Once an opponent of Christ, he was no so convinced
 of the rescue plan God had inaugurated in Jesus,
 that he became an evangelist and a church planter.

Most of us could share our own stories of conversion and transformation.
 Like Paul we see in the Gospel
 God's riches and wisdom.

But if we see God's riches and wisdom in the **Gospel**
 We also see it in in **creation**:
 How God made the world out of nothing.
 How God sustains all that has life and breath.

In the Book of Proverbs God's wisdom in creation is praised:
 "The Lord by **wisdom** founded the earth;
 by **understanding** he established the heavens;
 by his **knowledge** the deeps broke open,
 and the clouds drop down the dew."^{xi}

In the Psalms, we are reminded of the enormity of God's abundance:

"You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
 and plants for people to use,
 [you] bring forth food from the earth,

and wine to gladden the human heart,
 oil to make the face shine,
 and bread to strengthen the human heart."^{xii}

God's wisdom and riches in creation are so incredibly amazing.

As I was preparing this sermon
 I came across a TED-talk
 where a man named Alexander Tsiaras (Si-r-as)
 Shared a video documenting the development of a baby:
 From conception to birth.

This video was the result of Tsiaras' (Si-r-as-es) work
 With medical micromagnetic resonance imaging data.
 [I will try to post a [link](#) on blog portion of the church website.]

In his TED-talk Tsiara (Si-r-as) showcases
 a 4 minute excerpt, set to Vivaldi's "Gloria".

In it we see the unfolding life of a fetus:
 From the first split of a fertilised egg
 to the baby's exit from the womb.
 All from real-life images...

[It's incredible and I encourage you to watch it!]

Commenting latter on this work, he says:
 "Even though I am a mathematician,
 I look at this with marvel of how do these instruction sets
 not make these mistakes
 as they build what is us?

It's a mystery, it's magic, it's divinity."^{xiii}

It's mystery, magic, divinity.
 Oh, the depth of the riches [AND]
 of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

Wonder and awe is where Paul leaves us this morning.
 And it is maybe a place we need to spend time lingering in.

For when we stop and take note
of all that God has done in creation and redemption...

We start to realise that while we are loved by God
that life isn't really all about us:

Sunday morning worship
Isn't about inspiration or ethics;
Work life and home life
Isn't about satisfaction or self-actualization.
Everything is about giving Glory to God.

Anything else would be turning the world upside-down,
like using Remembrance Day ceremony
as an opportunity to honor ourselves.

Yes, "It is true and it is glorious that God loves us
and [created us and] has redeemed us.
But he has done this, not because we are so worthy,
but because he is so worthy.

We have been redeemed for a purpose,
that we might eternally inhabit the kingdom of Jesus Christ.
And that has happened, not of or for ourselves,
but of and for him who [saved] us.

[When we die and go to meet our maker]
we will exist for the same purpose that we now exist,
to show forth the glory of God.^{xiv}

**"For from him and through him and for him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen."**

ⁱ Valerie Fortney "Fortney: A decade after Capt. Nichola Goddard's death, her family continues her legacy" Calgary Herald May 16, 2016

ⁱⁱ Answer to first question of Westminster Confession's Shorter Catechism.

ⁱⁱⁱ James Montgomery Boice *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?* 156

^{iv} Romans 11:36 NIV

^v Romans 11:33 NRSV my caps

^{vi} John Stott *The Message of Romans* 309

^{vii} Romans 10:12-13 NRSV

^{viii} Colossians 2:2 NRSV

^{ix} Jack Zavada "The Apostle Paul's Conversion Story" April 12, 2017 www.thoughtco.com/conversion-of-paul-700197

^x Ibid

^{xi} Proverbs 3:19-20 NRSV

^{xii} Psalm 104:14-15 NRSV

^{xiii} Alexander Tsiaras "Conception to birth—visualised" www.ted.com/talks/alexander_tsiaras_conception_to_birth_visualized/transcript#t-224799

^{xiv} R. C. Sproul Jr, Ed *After darkness, light* 199