

Monday, April 22, 2025
Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-3

A Letter to Us

You are not supposed to read other people's mail. If it's not for you, it's rude to open their mail. It's also illegal.

A federal statute known as 18 USC Section 1702 makes it illegal to open correspondence addressed to someone else. However, the law cannot be applied if you did not recognize that the mail was not yours when you opened it.

But it's hard to claim that when we opened this letter we "did not recognize that the mail was your when you opened it." After all, this is the first letter to the Corinthians, not the High Ridgians (I kind of like that term). The letter even makes it clear in 1 Cor. 1:2, "to the Church of God that is in Corinth." Again, that's not us.

But while the letter was originally addressed to a gathering on the other side of the world, the words are very much for us. As we read through the letter in the weeks ahead, you'll see plenty of parallels between Corinth and our world some 2,000 years later. You'll see parallels between the ancient church and the modern church.

But most of all, you'll see our connection to them and to all God's people in Christ. For this letter is "to those sanctified (made holy!) in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place (including High Ridge!) call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours."

Across time and space, we are united in Christ Jesus who has made us holy by His death and resurrection. He has joined us to Himself in His one body – the Church along with all whom He has called by faith and now call in faith upon Him who saves.

Make no mistake, this letter is for us. We will be confronted with our sins. We will be guided to follow Christ. Most of all, we will be assured of the One hope that is for all God's people – Jesus, who has called even us High Ridgians to be saints.

Prayer: O Jesus Christ, as You have made us holy by faith, lead us into lives that are set apart to follow You and the way that leads to eternal life. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, April 23, 2024

Read 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

All Knowledge

There are those who claim to have special, secret knowledge of the truth: things that they claim are new or hidden ideas, which, of course, mean that they are special and always end up denying the Lord who bought them. It is true that other humans, even church leaders, can make mistakes or even be confused by the devil into trying to deceive believers; but they too get caught on the same truth - God has given His people all truths, and those truths are available to all of people, directly through His Holy Spirit living in me and through His Word the Bible.

Thus I have all knowledge, I have all truths through God's personal intervention in my life. There is great comfort and protection in that knowledge. There is comfort because I am not missing out on anything. Others may preen themselves on their knowledge or their pretender expertise. But whatever! I still have God's assurance that I have everything I need. I have not missed out on a hidden way to heaven or an obscure sin that condemns me.

On the other hand, I am also protected, protected against temptation. The devil wants me to look for ways to make salvation dependent upon my own efforts. He tries to convince me that if I just find the hidden ways, my salvation will depend on my research that way, or that my special idea makes me one of the few who can say "I did it." I didn't! So I just continue to trust in my God and not myself.

Prayer: Thank you, my God. Thank you for the knowledge You give me that You have saved me. Thank you again. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, April 24, 2024

Read 1 Cor 1:10-17

The United and Divided

“I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment” 1 Co

1:10

Christ is not divided. Divisions and quarreling—*strife, discord, rivalry* are causing disagreement in the Church in Corinth. Paul had appealed to the Church to agree, and he desired no attachment to his name being followed and those claiming to follow Apollos or Cephas. But to follow Christ alone as Christians. As one should follow Christ—to Whom all glory belonged. Martin Luther, around 1522, requested, similarly as Paul, to German Christians in the sixteenth century,

“In the first place, I ask that men make no reference to my name; let them call themselves Christians, not Lutherans. What is Luther? After all, the teaching is not mine.... Neither was I crucified for anyone.... St. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3, would not allow the Christians to call themselves Pauline or Petrine, but Christian. How then should I—poor stinking maggot-fodder [“bag of worms”] that I am—come to have men call the children of Christ by my wretched name? Not so, my dear friends; let us abolish all party names and call ourselves Christians.”

We do and should confess the same thing—in one mind, as Christians, as the one true holy catholic Church. As Confessional Lutheran Christians, we confess the Ecumenical Creeds and Lutheran Confessions because true teaching in the Word of God is worth standing on and defending amid error and heresy. Scripture alone is our primary authoritative source of Christian teaching, and in all matters concerning salvation and justification [declared righteous] by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Paul spoke about factions, immoral behaviors, and quarreling in Corinth. Luther is speaking against the violence that arose in the Church during the Reformation: *A Sincere Admonition ... To All Christians To Guard Against Insurrection and Rebellion* (Luther’s Works, 45, p. 51).

Luther and Paul are writing in different contexts and problems in Christ’s Church, yet division and quarreling were evident in both. How do we handle quarreling today? All Christians should identify with Christ first and foremost as ones who are Baptized into the Name of Christ and confess Christ’s Name only as salvation. The wisdom and power of God is in the Gospel we see in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and in no one else. Paul is teaching the name of Jesus Christ, Who is our source of life, forgiveness, and salvation, and Who we follow and confess, having the same mind and conviction. Paul and Luther, in either case, pointed to Jesus for our salvation and confession, for the truth is in Christ alone.

Prayer – Lord Jesus, guard, guide, and protect me from division, quarreling, and rebellion, but keep me in Your Word and Truth for Your Name’s sake. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, April 25, 2024
Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Wise Foolishness

“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” 1 Corinthians 1:18

"The Lord works in mysterious ways." So goes the modern proverb. Paul puts it in a different and stronger way: God works in silly, even foolish ways.

Perhaps another way to put it is that God doesn't play by our rules. God has little concern for human propriety or wisdom. What human would call it wise to be tortured and crucified by Romans? What human would call it wise for all the prophets to be ignored, persecuted, and martyred?

If the cross of Christ looks like a good thing to you, you can be assured that you have some kind of spirit in you. Either a spirit of insanity that makes you think that death is good or the Holy Spirit of God which shows you a wisdom hidden from before the foundation of the world. The salvation of our God appears to all rationality to be a failure and a shame: God pushed on His back foot and forced into a shameful crucifixion. This shows you how you ought to regard rationality in these matters. God laughs in the face of how we think things ought to be. He crushes human wisdom and human avenues of salvation. It makes sense that good people ought to be rewarded. God reveals the sins of so-called good folks and condemns them for their unbelief. It makes sense that evil people should be punished. God puts faith into evil hearts and removes their punishment.

For all of this, we thank and praise Him, serve and obey Him, knowing by the power of His Spirit that all that seems foolishness is wisdom and all that seems weakness is strength.

Prayer: Lord of all foolishness, we thank you that you have sent Your Christ, Himself the wisdom and power of God, to become weak and suffer foolishness for we who are truly weak and foolish by nature. Make us strong and wise unto salvation by Your mighty power that we may see things as You do and not be fooled by worldly "wisdom" or "might". Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Friday, April 26, 2024

Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Boasting

“Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:31 ESV).

I don't usually enjoy feeling foolish, though I am afraid it is a frequent occurrence. I don't like to feel weak, but when I go to the gym I can't help but feel weak some days. I don't like being despised and usually, I'll do just about anything to try to smooth over ruffled feathers. I want to be wise and strong and well-liked by everyone if I can and in and of itself that is fine but sometimes, I think it is my pride that makes me want these things. Maybe you feel the same way at times. No one wants to be thought poorly of by someone else and no one wants to think poorly of ourselves. We all want to fit well into our communities and be respected by everyone around us. We like to tell ourselves, or at least I like to tell myself, that a little bit of pride won't hurt anyone but then we run into our text today.

In this text, God turns everything upside down. Now all of those things that I don't like being are exactly what God prefers to use. God shows us that pride gets in the way and that He does His best work with those things that are weak and foolish and despised. Jesus came to earth as a baby and there aren't many things that are weaker than a baby, but that baby was stronger than death. The rulers of Jesus' day thought that He was foolish but everywhere He went people called Him teacher. And now in our text Paul calls Jesus the “wisdom of God.” Jesus was despised by those He came to save to the point that He was crucified for them. Jesus served as our example in weakness and now He is reigning at the right hand of the Father. We may be in places where we feel weak and foolish and despised but when we are humble and when we boast in the Lord, we know that that He is working through us and that we belong to Him.

Prayer: Lord make us humble. Lead us to boast only in You and never in ourselves so that the world might know that You are the Wisdom of God. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson

Saturday, April 27, 2024

Read [1 Cor 2:1-5](#)

“Jesus Christ and Him Crucified”

Why do you go to church? Is it to sing along to the greatest hits of the 17th century? To talk to so and so? Because you love to hear the kids saying the funniest things in the children’s message? The flowers? The cute girl in the cookie line after church? Is it to hear Pastor’s great anecdotes? All these things are good. They can be very good – beautiful, artistic, tasty, funny, empowering, uplifting, and more! But why should we go to church?

The answer to this question was simple and straight-forward for Paul: “**I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.**” You might point out that Paul wasn’t known as a great preacher. “He’s just making excuses for himself.” And, it’s true that the Bible says as much – that Paul was known much more for his writing than speaking abilities. But, you and I know, what he said is exactly why we come to church.

“Tell me about Jesus!” That’s the request that puts the biggest smile on a pastor’s face, or at least it should be. Any pastor likes to think of himself as a good preacher. He enjoys telling the Story in a new way, with a creative twist, with the perfect illustration. The ability to do those things, too, are also good. Pastors go to school and dedicate themselves to one of the hardest occupations and should be comfortable in the pulpit and capable of preaching well. But, the devil works hardest in the Church.

If parishioners can be tempted to go to church in order to be entertained, pastors can be tempted to believe people are coming to hear them preach. Nothing works on a preacher’s ego more than to hear “that was the best sermon!” As well-meant and thankful as that comment was said, it can be heard with prideful ears.

This reading lays bare the only reason that should continually drive us to come back, again and again, every week. “Show me Jesus!” And, the reason for pastors: “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” Hearing about Jesus – crucified – draws us in and, when called to preach, brings one so much closer to Him in preparing to tell others that the joyful, Good News just bubbles over and fills the sanctuary and the hearts of God’s people with Jesus.

Pastors are ordinarily showered with countless other abilities – singing, leading, administration, teaching, etc. God cares for His people in many ways through His chosen servants. But let’s be truthful about why we’re here: we want to know about Jesus! Tell me about how He was crucified to make me righteous. Help me to see Him alive, outside the tomb. Show me the holes in His hands and side! Show me the Lamb of God!

We pray: Lord Jesus, You have blessed Your people with faithful men who tell about You. Continue to nurture us so until You return. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, April 29, 20254
Read 1 Corinthians 2:6-16

Spiritual Wisdom

And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. 1 Corinthians 2:13

Have you ever opened your mouth when you shouldn't? I have. If you're nodding your head in agreement, take comfort, we're not alone.

In the 1800s, Lord Kelvin, president of Britain's Royal Society, stated that the fledgling invention of the radio had "no future." He also said "flying machines are impossible." About the same time, a British parliamentary committee said Edison's light bulb was "unworthy of attention of practical or scientific men."

Perhaps the worst foot-in-your-mouth instance came when, in 1889, the director of the United States Patent Office urged President William McKinley to close down the office because "everything that can be invented has been invented."

So, what should we learn?

Simply this -- be careful what and whom you believe. Human wisdom isn't all it's cracked up to be. The facts of today can easily become the falsehoods of the future.

That's why I get considerable comfort from knowing that God's wisdom and direction for living have held up for thousands of years. While the brilliance of human brains comes and goes, God's wisdom is something that we can all trust; His crucified and risen Son is the one in whom we can place our faith without fear or reservation. Humanity will invent many more things, but no wisdom can surpass the wisdom of Christ.

Prayer: Wise and all-knowing Lord, grant us the grace to place our faith and trust in what comes from You and not be led astray by our own thoughts or the world's opinions. In the name of true wisdom, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Adapted from a devotion from "By the Way"

Tuesday, April 30, 2024

Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

God's Mercy Through Fellow Christians

I am blessed by God with my fellow Christians. They give me support in life in time, attention, and teaching. They are part of my life. But that very fact brings temptation into my life, for now, I have others to want to dominate to protect myself, glorify myself, you name it. I worry they are people, they might trouble me.

Praise God. He keeps me level-headed. With His reminding and comforting presence, I can ignore the temptation to claim that I know the better teachers, and then to claim that that makes me superior to my fellow believer. He may well have some misunderstandings in the Gospel, that God needs to correct; but that is God's problem not either my problem or my privilege to fix.

I find my fellow Christian to sometimes shame me, and then make me angry - angry at myself, but I take it out on my friend. Again, I turn to my Lord in sorrow. I keep failing Him. I know better and I still fall into the trap. I am sorry my Lord, I do what is wrong to you and to my friend. I need my Jesus' help to go to that friend and apologize, to admit that I am ashamed to another.

It is glorious though, Jesus forgives me, strengthens me to do what is right, to apologize and to accept the shame I deserve. It doesn't matter to me whether my friend does what is right or not. God will take care of Him. It is that I am right with God myself.

Prayer: Thank you God so much for keeping with me. I fail so often and yet you put me back on the right track. Thank you again.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, May 1, 2024

Read 1 Cor 3:10-17

God's Holy Temple

"God's temple is holy, and you are that temple."

1 Co 3:17

Christ Jesus is the only foundation upon which we are built as God's building. We must care how we build upon Christ's foundation as God's holy Temple. This includes pastors and parishioners—all Christians worldwide. **"Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ"** (vv. 10-11). The temple(s) in Jerusalem, built with materials such as gold, stone, and wood, were destroyed by fire and were plundered and plummeted. There is no promise in these materials, but only in Christ. We need not look to buildings for our salvation, but on Christ, THE Temple, destroyed on the cross and resurrected from the dead on the third day for our salvation from sin, death, and the power of hell and Satan.

We look to Jesus and His actions in redemption for us and His teaching on how we are to love as He loved. There is no other foundation but Christ. If our teaching is false, it will be exposed, and what is left is the Truth of Christ we believe, teach, and confess.

Lutheran Reformer Philipp Melancthon wrote on this passage concerning *The Church*,

"We teach that this church truly exists, consisting of true believing and righteous people scattered through the entire world. And we add its marks: the pure teaching of the gospel and the sacraments. This church is properly called "the pillar ... of the truth" [1 Tim. 3:15*] for it retains the pure gospel, and, as Paul says [1 Cor. 3:12*], "the foundation," that is, the true knowledge of Christ and faith. Even though there are among these people many weak ones who build upon this foundation structures of stubble that will perish (that is to say, certain useless opinions), nevertheless, because they do not overthrow the foundation, these things are to be both forgiven them and also corrected. The writings of the holy Fathers bear witness that at times even they built stubble upon the foundation but that this did not overturn their faith. But most of what our opponents defend does overthrow faith, as when they condemn the article on the forgiveness of sins in which we said that the forgiveness of sins is received by faith. Again, it is a manifest and pernicious error when the opponents teach that people merit the forgiveness of sins by love for God prior to grace. For this, too, removes the "foundation," that is, Christ. Again, what need will there be for faith if the sacraments justify *ex opere operato* [by the mere performance of the rite] without a good impulse in those using them?" (Ap AC:20-21).

Prayer – Gracious Father, we are Your holy Temple, and You have given us Your Spirit. Grant faith to always believe and confess Christ Jesus, the One True foundation. Amen

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, May 2, 2024
Read 1 Corinthians 3:18-22

All Things are Yours

“For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.” 1 Cor. 3:22

"All things are yours." What a strange exhortation the Apostle Paul gives to us. To a church like Corinth whose sins are on the surface and evident to all, Paul gives this promise as a warning. If you think you are anything, you are wrong. If you think you are wise, you are a fool. And yet, all things are yours, life and death and present and future. Christ's words are true, the meek shall inherit the earth.

Christians are royalty in this world by virtue of being united with the King of kings. And yet, this is not license for sin or greed or pride. Instead, Paul reminds us that though we have all things, we are not the final authority. Even if we have all wisdom, there is knowledge higher than us. Paul reminds us that as high and mighty as we might think we are and might indeed be, we are always subject to Christ our Master. This is a very good thing!

Think of all the ruin that you have caused with your so-called wisdom. Think how woefully inadequate your so-called wealth is when real problems arise. But think all the more at how adequate the foolishness of God crucified is for us! Think how the wisdom and power of Christ undoes and overpowers all that we think we have done. Thanks be to God that He undoes all the sins and struggles that we have done. And He gives us all things and even more, makes us His own.

Prayer: God of all creation, we thank You that You have made us Your own. You have showered us with gifts greater than the wealth of the world. You have confounded our wisdom for our own salvation. Teach us to hold fast to what the world considers foolish and weak, the crucifixion of Your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Friday, May 3, 2024

Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Faithful Stewards

“1 This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.” (1 Corinthians 4:1-2 ESV).

In high school I had a coach named Coach Murley who was a big gruff guy and from one moment to another he was either super scary or he was a big teddy bear there wasn't much of an in between. He and I had gotten to know each other for a few years and by the time my senior year rolled around I was one of his favorites so when the time came that he needed someone to move his truck for him so that the bus could pick up the team, he told me to do it. He tossed me his keys, and, in that moment, I was scared because he was trusting me with his truck and all I could think about were the door dings and chipped paint that would inevitably come from me just getting into the truck let alone driving it. In the end everything was fine with the truck and my imagination had just gotten the better of me, but I remember this story now because of this text's language of stewardship.

We as God's people through Christ have been trusted with many things. God has given to us the news of salvation in the Gospel, He has given us the Sacraments, and He has given us one another in the Church. Paul tells us that because we have been trusted with all of these things, we must be faithful as stewards. We have been given these things for a purpose. Christ wants us to use these things in service to His kingdom and He brought us into His kingdom so that we may be His people and so that we can help make others His people too. Paul also tells us that we know who we are accountable to for how we handle these gifts. It isn't other people (Including coach Murley), and it isn't us, but God to whom we are accountable. So be faithful with His gifts and share them with those around you.

Prayer: Father thank You for all of the gifts that You have given us including Your own Son Jesus. Help us to be faithful stewards of Your gifts and to share them with others. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson

Saturday, May 4, 2024

Read [1 Cor 4:8-13](#)

“Commencement”

It’s that time of year. No, I’m not talking about May the Fourth (Star Wars Day). Even before a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away; high school seniors have gotten antsy this time of year. Graduation! Finally, they can forget about school and diagramming sentences, calculating the area of a triangle, and Chromebooks. They’re free! Graduated, Done, Finished – forever! (At least until college, or work, or life goes on any other way...)

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians has, up until this point, been describing these Christians as relatively new believers who don’t realize how new they are. In today’s reading, Paul uses rich sarcasm to explain to them their true condition. **“Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!”**

Paul’s saying, “No – it’s not graduation – it’s commencement!” Being baptized and coming into a relationship with God isn’t the end – it’s the beginning. Becoming a child of God doesn’t immediately send you into a perfect life, experiencing God’s glory every moment of every day. Life on earth as a Christian is oftentimes harder than it is for a non-believer. For evidence of this, just look to Paul:

He describes his and his fellow apostles’ lives as similar to the tail end of a conquering Roman army procession. The soldiers would lead the celebratory march into Rome, surrounded by cheering citizens. Trailing along behind them, though, was a selection of those defeated. These “losers” were marching to their show trial, after which they’d be publicly executed. That’s what Paul often felt like!

The contrast between his self-description and the Corinthians is stark: they are well-off, well-fed, and strong. Paul hungers and thirsts, he’s poorly dressed and homeless, living by manual labor, and always turning the other cheek when attacked. He closes, **“We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.”**

But Paul’s purpose isn’t to make them depressed. He’s not trying to take away their vision of heaven in which they’ve been living. He wants to inspire them to continue to hear the Word, receive the Sacraments, and grow in Christ. Paul would fully agree that the life of a Christian isn’t always easy. Like them, He knows Jesus and looks forward to walking with Him in Paradise. But, knowing Jesus and the future makes the present hardships fade from view while filling him with joy at the opportunity to tell others about his loving Savior.

In light of the holiday, the Star Wars analogy might be Luke Skywalker. Luke became a Jedi in a moment, but it took much training, mentoring, and experience before he became a wise, powerful Jedi Master.

We pray: Heavenly Father, thank You for baptizing me into Your family. Strengthen me for the hard times and fill me with Your joyful Good News to share with others. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, May 6, 2025

Read 1 Corinthians 4:14-21

Who Do You Imitate?

“Though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me.” 1 Corinthians 4:15-16

We often like to pretend that we are truly independent thinkers and actors, but most of the time we are imitators. We pick up the speech and language of those we are around. We dress like those we emulate. We think and act like those we admire or respect or see as the model for what we should be. We might use a different word (influenced, shaped, etc), but we are all imitators.

The question is not really, “Do you imitate someone else?” The better question is, “Who do you imitate?”

It is common for children to imitate their parents – for good and for ill. Paul doesn’t mean for the Corinthian Christians (or us) to imitate him in every way, but in the ways Paul is imitating Christ – by seeking to be faithful, in finding true wisdom in Christ, in enduring hardship and suffering by looking to Christ.

This reading calls us to consider a few important things:

1. Who do you imitate? Are those people whom you imitate seeking to imitate Christ? If not, are they worthy of your imitation?
2. Who are your spiritual fathers (parents, pastors, teachers) who have taught you the faith? Pray for them to imitate Christ and pray for the influence they have (for good and for ill) over those who are their spiritual children.
3. Finally, certainly imitate Paul’s humility. He often recognizes his own sin (Romans 7:24-25, 1 Timothy 1:15, among others), but also he looks to the Savior whom Paul imitates, knowing that Christ alone saves sinners.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, give me faith to follow and imitate you. Bless and guard all spiritual fathers that they would be faithful to you, and godly examples to those entrusted to them. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, May 7, 2024

Read 1 Corinthians 5:1-5

Fellowship with God

It is a great joy to think of what God has done for me. He has forgiven my sin, that enslaved me, that drove me towards only looking for myself. In doing that, He has made me free, free so that I can do my life with Him, free to do good. In freeing me from my preoccupation with myself, He has freed me from a desire to boss my fellow people around.

Now I can be neighborly, now I can share joys and sorrows with others. What a great gift our Lord has given me. And with His presence, I can share with others what He has given me! I am freed to relate to others, in Him.

But while I can share my fellowship with my God with others, I can't share that fellowship with those who reject Him, with those whose life shows that they are not listening to or living with God themselves. If I should share fellowship with such, I would join with their objections to God and thus break away from my God. That, I don't want to ever do.

It's not a matter of my claiming a right to condemn, its not a matter of me being superior to another. His future lies in tatters, his relationship to God has gone. My relationship with God demands that I make clear that I am not in fellowship with such activities or anyone who participates in them. I can do that only because I am with God. He, then, is expressing Himself through me.

Prayer: Oh, God spare my friends. Keep them from sin - but also strengthen me to share the truth even unpleasant truths with them. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, May 8, 2024

Read 1 Cor 5:6-13

Christ, Our Passover Lamb

“Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.” 1 Cor 5:7

Jesus is *The* Messiah, our Passover Lamb, Who has passed over our sins in His blood shed for us on a piece of wood. Jesus is the door (see John 10) we enter for salvation and follow into eternity. Jesus said, **“I AM [ἐγώ εἰμι—the *being one*] the door”** (John 10:7,9; compare Exodus 3:14; 12:7, 13), for which we (New Covenant Christians *are* one Church with all true believers in the promised Messiah of Old Covenant) *are* God’s people in Jesus. Jesus is the New Covenant and fulfillment of the Law (Torah), Old Covenant promises, and Passover (see Exodus 12; Deut 16:1-8); its observances and celebrations. The one and only final sacrifice for all humanity is in Jesus’ blood atoning payment for our sins on the cross. For **“without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins ... For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are *copies* of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God [the Father] on our behalf ... But as it is, He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself”** (Heb 9:22,24,26; see Lev 17:11; He 9:11-28; *italics mine*).

Paul talked about *old leaven*, a *new lump*, and *unleavened bread* (vv. 7-8). Jesus said, **“Watch and beware of the leaven [*hypocrisy and teaching—malice and evil*] of the Pharisees [*and Sadducees and of Herod*]”** in Matt. 16:6, 12; see Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1. These persons reject God in rejecting *Christ/Messiah*, claiming to be God’s people. Paul is saying to the Church not to celebrate the Passover as hypocritical brothers who practice sinning and as the false teachers of Israel who place themselves under the Law of sin and death, but as Christians under grace, unleavened, looking to Christ our Passover Lamb in sincerity and Truth! **“Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth”** (v. 8). This sincerity and Truth are only realized through faith in Christ alone.

Christians are not to be hypocrites in practicing evil, sexual immorality, and idolatry; to not associate with the sexually immoral, cheaters, greedy persons, drunkards, robbers, abusers, false teachers, and idolaters in the Church; and not to associate or eat with the guilty leavened brother or sister (v. 11). To those outside the Church Paul wrote, **“For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. **“Purge the evil person from among you”** (vv. 12-13).**

Prayer – Christ Jesus, You are our Passover Lamb Who takes away all our sins. Guard us from all evil and grant us true faith and sincerity to worship and follow You into eternity. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, May 9, 2024
Read 1 Corinthians 6:1-11

Don't You Know...

"Do you not know that we are to judge angels?" (1 Corinthians 6:3)

You know, as a matter of fact, Paul, I didn't know that. It's easy in our day-to-day lives to minimize or forget the wonder of our faith. It's common for Christians to compartmentalize the miracles that God has showered upon us as we live because we live in such an earthy, material world.

It was no different in the early church in Corinth. In a large city whose ever-present vices were not much different than those happening in our present age. Whose massive commercial industry so easily convinced the citizens that it should be their main focus in life. The temptation for Christians then was not so much to deny the faith as it was to ignore it, to put it on the back burner, to live their lives based on a different set of truths.

Paul reminds us that it should not be so. We should not so quickly forget that Christians live a markedly different life than non-believers. We should not be so distracted by laws and rights and fairness in this world that we lose sight of the glorious inheritance set before us in Jesus Christ. We should not be so fixated on the things of this world that we forget what is above. When believers do something like taking one another to court, they bring shame to the church by showing that their attention is on the things of this world and admitting that they need the wisdom of the world to solve their disputes.

Paul shows us another way: the way of Jesus. "Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?" Just as our Lord suffered wrong at the hands of His brothers and did not assert His authority but suffered with humility, so we should live in Jesus' light by doing as He has taught us to do. We ought to suffer with joy, ignoring and forgetting all the troubles of this world for the surpassing goodness set before us.

Prayer: Jesus Christ, You have given us all things through Your death and resurrection. Teach us to forget all worldly things that we might live in Your peace. Teach us to treat one another as You have first treated us: mercifully forgiving and bearing one another's burdens. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Friday, May 10, 2024

Read 1 Corinthians 6:15-20

United with the Spirit

Paul doesn't really mince words in this text. He calls it exactly as he sees it and he tells the Corinthians that their current behavior is unacceptable. He tells them that the sexual immorality that they have been living in will be a problem for them if they continue in this way. Paul teaches us a little something about marriage here and how we are supposed to treat our bodies. Paul teaches the Corinthians that they have been united to Christ and if they are members of Christ then they should no longer be joining their bodies to others in inappropriate ways. Paul uses the example of a prostitute so that he can be perfectly clear. Anything or anyone that we join ourselves with we bring into the body of Christ and if those things are unfit to be part of that body, then we probably shouldn't be linking ourselves with them.

We help bring people into the church properly when we are united with the Spirit. It is important that believers set an example for the world in conduct and that means not giving in to the desires of the flesh. It means exercising self-control so that other can see that in the Church, Christ offers us a better way. Christ gave himself so that He could make His bride pure. He has made us pure by His blood and now we wait for Him to come again and be united with us fully. While we wait, we should act accordingly, not unfaithfully but faithfully.

Prayer: Lord, fix our eyes on you and protect us from temptations. Lead us in Your way so that we can reflect your love to the world. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson

Saturday, May 11, 2024

Read [1 Cor 7:1-16](#)

“Sex and Marriage”

It’s hard to be a child of God here in this world, isn’t it? Here we are, baptized into Christ, our sins washed away, and we’ve risen out of those waters a new person. We’ve been adopted into God’s family and have begun our eternal life. But then, before that baptismal water has even begun to dry, we see the world around us. You have to admit, even in the Church the effects of our sinful world are everywhere. Aging, sickness, people squabbling with each other – it’s already a challenge to be a child of God. And then, we step outside the Church!

The Corinthians had been baptized into God’s family and had heard God’s Word preached to them countless times. But, many of them didn’t have a religious upbringing, and they lived in Corinth. There, their neighbors considered it normal to worship pagan gods by having relations with religious prostitutes. Some didn’t marry, because (like today) they didn’t see any value in it. If it’s “all about me”, it doesn’t make any sense to freely and fully give yourself to another. And some, in reaction to this environment, reacted to the other extreme by swearing off sex and hiding themselves in a solitary life of chastity.

And so, Paul answers a question they’d written him to hear how he weighed in. “Is it good for a man to not have sexual relations with a woman?” In previous chapters, Paul has already written negative words condemning sexual immorality, but he now gives his own advice on how to live, as well as God’s instructions.

Yes, it is fine for someone to live a life without sexual relations. He, Paul, was a single man (at least at this point in his life), and he found he could more fully devote himself to his apostolic work this way. For him, it was a good fit. But Paul was human (as is God through Jesus), and understands that celibacy isn’t a life for many. Most people are sexual, and will find themselves drawn to the unhealthy, immoral side if they forever try to “just say no”.

God’s plan for us since Adam and Eve has been for marriage to be the place to enjoy this gift. The world then and now considers it merely a transaction, something “bought or sold” to enrich one while offering enjoyment to the other. But what God has in mind is so much more. In marriage, men and women give themselves selflessly to each other, experiencing in a small way what Christ did for His Church.

This text reminded me of a movie I saw 20 years ago, “[Raising Helen](#).” Just another romantic comedy, in it a single Lutheran pastor and a single woman present a light-hearted look at how two Christians of the opposite sex can faithfully relate to each other. (I know, from Hollywood?!)

We pray: Heavenly Father, give the gift of celibacy to those You’ve empowered for that life. To the rest of Your children, give patience and a husband or wife and teach us to give to each other as Jesus gave for all. In His Name, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, May 13, 2025

Read 1 Corinthians 7:17-24

If Only

“Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned him, and to which God has called him.” 1 Corinthians 7:17

How often have we been tempted to cry, “If only...!”

If only I had a little bit more. If only I had the breaks (or money or talents or...) that he’s been given.

Paul helps us to put things in their proper perspective: to make the best of things versus pining for what might have been. Paul is not claiming that every situation that we may endure will be a good one. In this reading, he’s not extolling the virtues of suffering (including living as a slave – v. 21). After all, he did tell slaves to become free if the opportunity was presented.

What Paul is encouraging is contentment. We are to see what you are given as from God, and so to make the best of the talents, gifts, relationships, and opportunities presented to you. See what you have as gifts from God. You can have this perspective through faith in the One who has created you and re-created you by faith in Christ.

The bottom line is that if you don’t appreciate and make the best of what you do have as a gift from God, no amount of “more” would make a difference.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, grant to me a grateful and contented heart that appreciates all that You have given to me and others. Then lead me each day to gratefully use well all that You’ve given. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, May 14, 2024

Read 1 Corinthians 7:25-40

Looking to the Future

There are times when the future looks ugly. Sometimes physical dangers approach, sometimes social dangers begin to attack, sometimes and on and on. But I know that when troubles come God is caring for me, that I will travel through the problems. But looking ahead, sometimes I need to plan a bit. I need to consider whether I should take on more responsibility.

There is no question concerning my moving through the troubles, I am simply depending on my God. The question comes whether I should increase the turbulence during the troubles. Above all, I suppose, I should question whether seeking the marriage partner that God wants for me, that God established as normal for men and women in the Garden of Eden, should come, should be accepted during a coming troubled time.

It is true that a "lighter" load would be beneficial during evil times. Perhaps, my attention on my God would be diverted by a new responsibility. Perhaps, both I and my, perhaps partner, will travel through better now apart, to be united later.

Or would I find that having a partner in life would increase my ability to resist the temptations of trouble? After all, God made men and women to be companions, partners, for their mutual benefit.

I think this is the sort of future looking needing to be placed at the altar of my LORD. He knows what is best and will convince me of what decision to make and show me its rightness. God knows more than I do.

Prayers: Please guide me LORD through the decisions of life. Let me be a benefit to those whose lives I share. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, May 15, 2024

Read 1 Cor 8:1-13

Knowledge and Love in Christ

“There is no God but one ... For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. However, not all possess this knowledge.” 1 Corinthians 8:4c, 6–7a

1 Corinthians 8:4c, 6–7a

Our One Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, through whom all things are, and exist, is One with the Father from whom all things are, and exist. This echoes John 1:1-3 (and many other places), for **“there is no God but one”** (v. 4), and Jesus’ words in John 10:30, **“I and the Father are one.”** (see also Colossians 1:15-16; cf. Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 1:1-2; Eph 4:4-7; 1 Tim 2:5).

Paul spoke about this knowledge and love and concerning food sacrificed to idols. Why? It is one thing to know something, and it is another to love (which **“builds up”** v. 1). The knowledge of being prideful (which **“puffs up”** v. 1) in that knowledge for yourself. Pride that is self-centered in what one knows, living for oneself and not for God, and not loving others. Yet, this knowledge and love together apply to all areas and aspects of life here on earth as people of Christ Jesus. The person who loves in the knowledge of salvation in Jesus Christ builds up the people of God (Christians are the people of God). Paul is talking about loving God and loving your neighbor here.

Paul wrote, **“However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled”** (v. 7). Paul wrote that food does not commend us to God, so eating food will not defile anyone (see v. 8), unless the weak person in Christ lacks understanding in their freedom in Christ *to eat or not to eat* (in that freedom), and is destroyed by your eating. Paul said, **“And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died”** (v. 11).

We Christians are called to love as Christ loved. We are not called, in selfish pride, to make our fellow heirs to Christ’s present Kingdom stumble by what we eat or do in our freedom in Christ *to eat or not to eat*, but to build up the people of God in the grace and knowledge and the love of God in Christ Jesus through whom you and all things were made and exist.

Prayer – Lord Jesus Christ, You have created all things and given us life in Baptism in Your death and Resurrection. Help us love as You loved us, keep Your commands, and joyfully proclaim the Gospel Word and Truth, for You live and rule with the Father and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, May 16, 2024
Read 1 Corinthians 9:1-14

Giving Due Respect

God works through means. In today's instance, those means are the devotion passage schedule assigning this passage on the treatment of church workers to the fieldworker who will very soon be leaving. Paul's advice is not complicated and not unimportant: Jesus has commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. Jesus does not say that this living should be lavish, neither does He say that it should be any less than anyone else.

Jesus leaves to pastors the freedom not to take use of this right and to work a different job to support their needs. Some pastors do choose to supplement their income with another occupation, especially in communities where churches struggle to find enough to support a full salary. Most pastors choose to devote themselves entirely to their ministry and accept the reward that is their right. The temptation for churches and pastors alike is to see wages paid to a pastor as somehow a diminishment of the spiritual importance of the pastor's work. The lower a salary a pastor accepts, the more pious he must be, the higher the salary, the more questionable his intentions. Does he preach and teach merely to make ends meet? It is all but impossible to shake these inclinations, but Paul's words help us set our views straight.

Pastors are like soldiers who are committed but still deserve a wage. Pastors are like vinedressers who love their work but still expect and deserve what is produced. Pastors are like, well, pastors who tend a flock and give their lives and expect their living from it. What each of these images has in common is that none of these hired workers, as committed to the cause as they may be, they are not in charge. Pastors do not do their own work but only do the work that Christ has set before them. Christ is the commander-in-chief, the vineyard owner, the owner of the flock. Christ is the one who puts pastors in churches, who gives them work to do, and Christ who gives them their reward through the church.

Prayer: Lord, teach us to regard Your servants with due respect. Help them to serve Your people with integrity and help churches ensure that all church workers can set their minds upon Your work rather than be distracted by the cares of this world. Amen

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Friday, May 17, 2024

Read 1 Corinthians 9:15-27

All Things to All People

“19 For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (Though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people that by all means I might save some. 23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.” (1 Cor. 9:19-23 ESV)

This text may surprise us when we first read it. Paul the guy who is always so bold in preaching the Gospel now says that he is actually very flexible with how he acts around others. He says that he will act how he needs to act to get along with whoever is around him. He takes the phrase “when in Rome, do as the Romans do” very seriously. Now it would be a step too far to think that Paul is somehow compromising his Christian faith by living in this way, but it is strange behavior for someone who earlier in the chapter was asserting his authority as an Apostle.

Paul isn't shy about why he does what he does. He tells the Corinthians and us that he is becoming “all things to all people so that by all means he might save some.” This is actually an incredibly selfless way to live for Paul. He is willing to go out of his way to act and speak in a way where the Gospel will have a chance to shine. Paul took other people's situations seriously. He didn't expect people's lives to change overnight or to change before he even gave them the Gospel. He brought the Gospel to them where they were because He recognized that every one of them was one of God's creatures whom Christ had come to save. He was willing to remove himself as an obstacle to the Gospel so that those he met could have the best chance to know Christ. Our lives may not look like Paul's. Most of us are not traveling preachers but each of us can reach out to people where they are and share with them the best news of all time which is Christ.

Prayer: Lord thank you for Paul's faithful witness to Christ. Help us to follow his example and the Example of Christ the even more faithful witness. Be with us in all that we do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson

Saturday, May 18, 2024

Read [1 Cor 10:1-13](#)

“Take Heed”

It’s not often that a reading from the Bible tells us its purpose. So often we’d like to know why God said something – “What was He thinking?” In today’s reading, Paul summarized five different sins that the Israelites had done during their 40 years in the wilderness, along with God’s judgement, and then wrote, “Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.”

Paul, of course, was writing this to the Christians of Corinth. He’s already detailed some of the Corinthians’ weaknesses earlier in his letter, but are we so different? Paul makes a strong argument that the Corinthians weren’t really very different than the Israelites that came out of Egypt. They’d been “baptized” by passing through (between) the waters of the Red Sea and by God “covering them” from the towering cloud over their heads. Like the Corinthians, they’d been fed “spiritual food” (manna) and drank “spiritual drink” (the water that came from the Rock). Jesus hadn’t yet been born, but God sacramentally provided for them just as he did for the Corinthians.

All the Israelites who came out of Egypt had been blessed by God in these way, yet, “with most of them God was not pleased, for they were laid low in the wilderness.” Paul is saying, “Corinthians: God has blessed you with the waters of baptism. He’s spoken to you by His Word. And He’s given His body and blood to you to strengthen your faith, forgive your sins, and build your unity. Don’t give in to temptation like your spiritual ancestors did, allowing sin to destroy your faith!”

What were their sins?

1. Desired evil
2. Became idolators
3. Indulged in sexual immorality
4. Tested God
5. Grumbled at God

Good thing these are only temptations of the past – NOT! Some Christians today say, “Once saved – always saved.” Paul would say, “NO”. We face no different temptations than the Hebrews who fled Egypt. We’re no not tempted differently than the Corinthians who tolerated and accepted the sinful ways of their world. But we have this message – in writing by Paul – from God: “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”

But the Holy Spirit has called us. We’ve been baptized in the Triune Name. And we know Jesus, Who died for our salvation. Paul ends this reading with this Gospel message of hope, “God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

We pray: Our Father, Who art in heaven, lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, May 20, 2025

Read 1 Corinthians 10:14-22

Run, Don't Walk

“Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.” 1 Corinthians 10:14

Today is Graduation Day for our preschoolers here at Hope. Please keep them in your prayers that the hope of Jesus that they have heard here will continue to be reinforced by a growing faith in the years ahead.

I was thinking about the preschoolers when I read today's text. Maybe that sounds strange as Paul tells us why we shouldn't take part in those things that glorify false gods (or their ways) because we've been united to Christ in the meal that we share at His table. Paul's argument probably didn't immediately have you thinking about preschoolers.

But...between Monday and Friday, probably 10 times each week, I'll hear the teachers encourage preschoolers to use their “walking feet” inside the building. Maybe you heard the same encouragement as a child, just phrased differently as “Walk, don't run.” Running is fine outside, but inside it can be dangerous as you may run into other people, and it greatly increases the chances that you'll break something.

When it comes to any association with false gods and their ways, when it comes to temptations to sin, Paul flips the advice on its head. Run, don't walk! Flee! Get away as soon as possible. Don't hang out around temptation and just see how things turn out. Paul (and we!) know how it usually turns out – if we choose to hang around temptation, we will indulge it because we're looking for an excuse to do so.

So run, don't walk away from temptation. But don't just run aimlessly. Run, don't walk to the refuge who is Your Savior Jesus Christ. Run to His forgiveness. Run to Him for strength. Run, don't walk to Him for help.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, give me Your Spirit to flee temptation and run to help in You. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, May 21, 2024

Read 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

A Godly Forgetting of Self

When Jesus entered my life, I lost my enthusiasm for myself. Oh, I still cared about me, and properly, God has given me the responsibility for caring for myself. But now, living in Him, while I can take care, it is no longer the center of my interest.

I was enslaved to sin, that is to myself, and my desires. But when I became like Jesus, with Him living in me, then I was freed, free from that worry about my own interests. Instead, as Jesus enables me to be like Him, I am free - to be a servant to all. Now I worry about those others, not about what they think of me, but about what is good for them. I consider what will build them up; I think about their good, leaving my own for God to take care. And He does!

To be God's child, to be a friend, to be loved by Him, changed me. I didn't come to Him to be changed, but He gives that as a special gift as well as salvation. He puts Himself out for me and in so doing, He changes me to be like Him. It was not an order, not forcing of my nature; rather it has been and continues to be an internal change, in which what was there once, is no longer ruling me. I am so blessed to be able to a friend to others, and only because, Jesus is my friend now!

Prayer: Thank you my God for giving me the gift of being like You. Please help me continue to grow more like You. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, May 22, 2024
Read 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

Traditions and *Head Coverings*

“But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.” 1 Corinthians 11:13

Our text today is about *head coverings*, prayer, and the husband as the *head* of the wife. Scripture is clear, and we need not explain away or push meaning(s) into God’s Word when addressing right and proper *headship*. Maintaining good and right Christian traditions/practices is not condemned in this passage but held fast to faithfully. Paul wrote, “I [ἐπαίνῳ—*praise*] **commend you because you remember me in everything and** [κατέχετε—*hold fast to, retain faithfully*] **maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you**” (v. 2).

You and I may not think of *head coverings* often. How and why do some practice prayer differently? Why is the husband the *head* of the wife, or why is the Father the *head* of the Son? Paul wrote from Holy Spirit inspiration handed down to meditate upon in this passage. Think of the word *Godhead* for a minute ... the nature of God as Triune (Three distinct Persons in One essence/substance) and Truly Divine, with all authority over all things, for which “**all things are from God**” (v. 12), visible and invisible in heaven and on earth—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Head can be a figure of speech (imagery) for authority, the Mighty Hand of God, and a physical part of the body which holds the brain. We remember Jesus’ Words after His resurrection from the dead before His ascension into heaven—to His present throne—to rule and reign in His Kingdom. Jesus said, “**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me**” (Matthew 28:18). The Eternal begotten Son of God receives authority from the Eternal Father, who is the *head* of the Eternal Word and Wisdom of God become flesh, Jesus Christ. Jesus laid down His life and took it up again, “**No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from My Father**” (John 10:18; see John 8:28; 12:49; 14:10; 16:13; 17:1-3). The *Godhead* exercises authority over all things, and The Triune God is revealed as the *Godhead*—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Paul explained here that the *head* of the Son of God—Jesus the Messiah, is God the Father. Just as Christ is the *head* of His Bride, the Church, as the *head* of the wife is her husband. Simply not recognizing the order of God’s Creation and who the *head* is, Paul said, “**If anyone is inclined to be** [φιλόνηκος—*quarrelsome*] **contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God**” (v. 16).

Prayer – Lord Jesus, create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within us. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, May 23, 2024

Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Living in the Unity of Christ

“But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you.” 1 Corinthians 11:17-18

There is much to say about this lengthy and important passage in 1 Corinthians. Much of our understanding of the Lord's Supper and even the Words of Institution are contained here. To narrow our scope from the large number of things we *could* profitably talk about today, instead we'll focus on Paul's focus in this passage: church unity. Though receiving Holy Communion can and should be a deeply personal experience, it is never an individual experience. Communion proclaims and creates unity between those communing and all Christians from all times who are themselves the body of Christ. We are joined to Christ when we eat and drink His body and blood and we have unity in Christ. The problem in the Corinthian church was that their lives and practice were contradicting the unity that was theirs in Christ. Their practice of Communion divided them one from another, exalting some and shaming others. They did not rightly discern the body of Christ. They failed to understand Communion as the church's rite of sharing together in the true presence of Jesus Christ. They did not rightly discern that their brothers and sisters were true members of the church and therefore of Christ. They disgraced their brothers and therefore Christ. The saving presence of Christ became a presence of judgment against them.

Though we are unlikely to fall into exactly the same trap as the Corinthians who were coming to Communion drunk and leaving some without anything to eat, still we struggle to love our church family as Christ would have us. We are divided over opinions and squabbles. We are quick to be frustrated and suspicious of one another. We love to doubt the faithfulness of others and sneer at their lives. Christ calls us ever to love. The Spirit daily moves in us to help us discern the body rightly, as sinners for whom Christ has died, and to see our brothers and sisters in love.

Prayer: Lord of the Church, be present with us in Your body and blood. Help us to avoid divisions and rightly discern those who are Your own as our dear brothers and sisters. Send Your Spirit into our hearts to keep us from sin. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminary Graduate Case Farney

Friday, May 24, 2024

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-3

The Spirit's Work in Us

“1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2 You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that on one speaking in the Spirit of God every say ‘Jesus is accursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit.” (1 Cor. 12:1-3)

In Pastor Jason’s sermon from this last Sunday, he quoted this text. He did it in the context of speaking the gospel to others because we are all empowered by the Spirit. I think it might be good for us to reflect on that theme again this week. Paul wants the Corinthians to know what it means for them to have spiritual gifts but before he lists the gifts that we often think of like speaking in tongues, miracles, and healing, he spends some time on what it means to have the Spirit as all. I have sometimes wondered what it means for me to have the Holy Spirit. I mean I’ve never healed anyone, I’ve never spoken in tongues, or interpreted them so what is the Spirit doing in me? Maybe you have felt the same way or maybe I’m the only one, but regardless Paul has an answer for that question. How do we know that the Spirit is at work in us? We know because we are people who say that Jesus is Lord. This can reassure us that when we confess that Jesus is Lord, we really do have the Spirit. And this isn’t just good news for us, it’s good news for our neighbor that needs to be shared. This was Pastor’s point in bringing up this text in his sermon. The Spirit guides us to speak of the promises that we have from Christ. The Spirit gives us the words and the courage to speak to those around us and help them to see that in Christ, God is working for their good. We can be confident that the Spirit is at work in us because we confess that Jesus is Lord, and we are blessed to be able to go out and share that truth with the world.

Prayer: Lord, help us to confess you. Help us to witness to those around us and help them to see that You Love them. Stir up Your Spirit in us so that we can share your love. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson

Saturday, May 25, 2024

Read [1 Cor 12:12-31](#)

“Diversity”

"In April 1944 a proposal to ensure women's suffrage (right to vote) and equality was presented to the French parliament. The presenter gave a lengthy speech, trying to emphasize the idea that women and men are actually the same. “There is only one small difference...” He never finished the thought, because everyone in parliament started to shout: " Vive la différence!" (Long live that difference!)" quotation from Velmir Srca of the internet

Diversity is one of the buzzwords of our culture today. “Our strength is our diversity!” Some take this basic idea and go to extremes with it: “Our government must look like the people,” not a bad thought on its face. But when you try to break down every different category of human being and “represent” that in any group of people, you’ll only be frustrated. And you’ll divide people.

God would agree with the French parliament – God loves His creation, every diverse bit of it – cicadas and all! But, as human beings always go to extremes, we’ve taken His diverse Creation and have tried to divide it. God would prefer to have a unified Creation, and He’s done that through Baptism.

When we’re baptized, Jesus’ Spirit is the one and only Spirit that baptizes us. From John the Baptist to the most recent baptism at Hope, the Holy Spirit has brought each of us faith in the Triune God, the forgiveness of sins, and membership in the one Church. God’s Creation is united in Christ!

So, we try to figure out how to divide this gift of God. OK. We’re different and have different gifts of the Spirit. So, we think we’re better than people with lesser gifts, right? Or, we’re jealous of those with greater gifts. We want to have no part of this united “body” – it’s too unfair!

Paul writes about how we’re all part of a “body” – the body of Christ. As I’m fixing mine right now, I think of it as how we’re all parts of a lawn mower. Each of us is a part – a wheel, a blade, a piston, a handle. We’re all different, but the lawn mower wouldn’t work without all of us. If we were all the blade, we’d have a pile of blades and no mower. If we want to be the motor, we couldn’t run without the gas tank. Every kind of part is needed for the whole. And God made us the part we are.

The Church needs preachers. How else would the Word be heard? But it needs organists, altar guild, and helpers for youth summer Sunday school, too. It needs old and young – the Church needs shut ins! Every part is essential for the lawn mower to be whole. I can tell you, when the mower isn’t whole, it doesn’t work. But when all the parts are there, it’s a beautiful thing. Vive the difference, and vive God’s oneness!

We pray: Holy Spirit, You bring every kind of person together in Your Church. Use me and the gifts You’ve given me to be the best I can be for You and my brothers and sisters in Christ. In His Name, Amen.

Here’s a song about this beautiful [One Body!](#)

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, May 27, 2024

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Love Never Ends...Really?

“Love never ends.” 1 Corinthians 13:8

Love never ends. So says Paul in 1 Corinthians 13. But it sure feels like it does, doesn't it? Breakups, divorce papers, funerals...life in our world would be better described with “Love always ends.” So then what does this passage mean? How is this true?

Love – as a noun and as a verb of something that exists – will not and cannot cease to exist. Faith can – it won't be needed when we see with our own eyes the One that we have been trusting in. Hope can end – after all “who hopes for what he sees?” (Romans 8:24).

But if in that moment before the throne of the Triune God love didn't continue to exist, you and I would not be able to stand in front of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Lord's love is everlasting – it is who He is and what He does. His love is both noun and verb, perfectly and eternally! And He and His saving Gospel cannot cease to exist.

It may look like earthly love will always end. But the person of God (love) will always remain.

Prayer: Father, thank You for the truth that You are love and that You will never stop loving me in Christ. What a reality! Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Adapted from a devotion from Portals of Prayer

Tuesday, May 28, 2024

Read 1 Corinthians 14:1-25

A Godly Use of the Tongue

I am thankful for what my Lord has done for me. He has rescued my life from sin, from condemnation, for devotion to bad doing. And when I am thankful, I find that I want to share my thankfulness with others. And God promises me his assistance in doing good things for others, which sharing with them about God's goodness surely is.

But there is a problem, well several, but there is a problem that can easily come in spite of my willingness or even because of my willingness. As I am freely expressing my Christian faith, living my life according to His will, sometimes, my life interacts with the life of others. And my life is expressing something to those others. It is easy for me to assume that what they understand me to be expressing differs from what I thought I was expressing. The freedom God gives me to speak to others implies that I want to be understood by them.

But even dealing with the same language I can misunderstand others and they can misunderstand me. What I think says "love" can sometimes be thought of as "bossy." With God's help, I want the language my actions speak to be a language understood by those who are "listening" to me. It takes time, time to listen to others, time to analyze what they are saying, time to learn how to express myself in their language. The wonder here is that God understands me and is willing and able, and does change me to tell others of His love!

Prayer: Lord, lead me to speak of You with clarity and express Your love with the generosity I've been shown through Christ. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, May 29, 2024

Read 1 Cor 14:26-40

Orderly and Peaceful

“For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.” 1 Corinthians 14:33

Orderliness in the holy catholic Christian church should be done properly. **“All things should be done decently and in order”** (v. 40). Paul explained proper order in psalms/hymns and praise, teaching, prophetic—proverbial and revelatory truth of Jesus Christ made known, and foreign languages, and an interpretation required to the hearers. All these are for the edification of all.

Sometimes, interpreters for sign language and foreign languages are in the church assembly. Today, you might see foreign tongues among English-speaking Christian churches; γλῶσσα (*glōssa*)—*tongue/language* is to be interpreted and in order, and if there is no interpreter, **“let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God”** (v. 28). Women are instructed to be silent—under their husbands’ headship in the assembly (see vv. 34-35). Those who prophesy (we call preachers) are to do so **“one by one”** (v. 31)—speaking the prophetic Word of God revealed in Holy Scripture concerning God’s divine will and matters in Christ Jesus to those gathered, and among **“all the churches of the saints”** (v. 33).

The Lutheran Confessions address orderliness, “[53] How, then, should Sunday and other similar church ordinances and ceremonies be regarded? Our people reply that bishops or pastors may make regulations for the sake of good order in the church, but not thereby to obtain God’s grace, to make satisfaction for sin, or to bind consciences, nor to regard such as a service of God or to consider it a sin when these rules are broken without giving offense. [54] So St. Paul prescribed in Corinthians that women should cover their heads in the assembly [1 Cor. 11:5], and that preachers in the assembly should not all speak at once, but in order, one after the other [1 Cor. 14:30–33]. [55] Such regulation belongs rightfully in the Christian assembly for the sake of love and peace, to be obedient to bishops and pastors in such cases, and to keep such order to the extent that no one offends another—so that there may not be disorder or unruly conduct in the church. [56] However, consciences should not be burdened by holding that such things are necessary for salvation or by considering it a sin when they are violated without giving offense to others; just as no one would say that a woman commits a sin if, without offending people, she leaves the house with her head uncovered. [57] The same applies to the regulation of Sunday, Easter, Pentecost, or similar festivals and customs.” (AC 28, 53-57).

Paul teaches proper order and peace about tongues and how a true prophet is a preacher of the Word of God, taught by the Holy Spirit, who reveals Christ, and that **“All things should be done decently and in order”** (v. 40).

Prayer – Lord Jesus, Grant us to desire Your Prophetic Word always and earnestly. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, May 23, 2024

Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Living in the Unity of Christ

“But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you.” 1 Corinthians 11:17-18

There is much to say about this lengthy and important passage in 1 Corinthians. Much of our understanding of the Lord's Supper and even the Words of Institution are contained here. To narrow our scope from the large number of things we *could* profitably talk about today, instead we'll focus on Paul's focus in this passage: church unity. Though receiving Holy Communion can and should be a deeply personal experience, it is never an individual experience. Communion proclaims and creates unity between those communing and all Christians from all times who are themselves the body of Christ. We are joined to Christ when we eat and drink His body and blood and we have unity in Christ. The problem in the Corinthian church was that their lives and practice were contradicting the unity that was theirs in Christ. Their practice of Communion divided them one from another, exalting some and shaming others. They did not rightly discern the body of Christ. They failed to understand Communion as the church's rite of sharing together in the true presence of Jesus Christ. They did not rightly discern that their brothers and sisters were true members of the church and therefore of Christ. They disgraced their brothers and therefore Christ. The saving presence of Christ became a presence of judgment against them.

Though we are unlikely to fall into exactly the same trap as the Corinthians who were coming to Communion drunk and leaving some without anything to eat, still we struggle to love our church family as Christ would have us. We are divided over opinions and squabbles. We are quick to be frustrated and suspicious of one another. We love to doubt the faithfulness of others and sneer at their lives. Christ calls us ever to love. The Spirit daily moves in us to help us discern the body rightly, as sinners for whom Christ has died, and to see our brothers and sisters in love.

Prayer: Lord of the Church, be present with us in Your body and blood. Help us to avoid divisions and rightly discern those who are Your own as our dear brothers and sisters. Send Your Spirit into our hearts to keep us from sin. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminary Graduate Case Farney

Friday, May 31, 2024

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-20

But in fact, Christ has been raised!

“14 And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. 15 We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.” (1 Corinthians 15:12-19).

Because we are just coming out of the season of Easter it is a good time to be reminded once again that the resurrection was and is incredibly important. One of my professors at the seminary told us a story about when he was serving as the pastor of a parish in a small town. He told his people that if Christ was not raised then he was a fool for being a pastor. He also told them that if Christ was not raised then they would be even bigger fools than him because they are the ones that come and listen to him every Sunday. When my professor told that story it brought Paul's words to life for me. It helped me to realize again that we really do confess something that is incredible. Believing that people have been and will be raised from the dead is incredible.

We believe that death is not the end all because of one man who not only raised others but was raised Himself. We are different than everyone else in the world because we believe that there will be a resurrection. And this resurrection isn't just a strange little idiosyncrasy of our faith it is the center of it. As Paul says, if this fact isn't true then we believe for nothing. I think that this is a beautiful text because it puts in perspective just how important the resurrection is for Christianity and then it assures us of the certainty of that resurrection. In verse 20 right after where we left off above Paul says, “**But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.**” Not only do we know that Christ's resurrection was a sure thing, but we also know that our own coming resurrections are a sure thing too. We know that we will be raised to be with Christ, and this is our hope while we wait for that day.

Prayer: Lord, help us to always remember the significance of Your resurrection. Help us also to look forward to the resurrection of all people when Your kingdom comes fully. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson

Saturday, June 1, 2024

Read [1 Cor 15:20-34](#)

“The Gospel”

Yesterday’s devotion leads directly into today’s, even borrowing my first verse (Zach – you can borrow “my” Gospel anytime!), “**But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead.**” Yesterday, the argument that Paul was making was that everything – life itself – would be absolutely, totally, hopeless without Christ’s resurrection. Today, he builds on that argument.

Paul’s trying to bring his message to the Corinthians to a close, and now he’s brought out the big guns. They’d heard the Good News that Paul had originally brought to them. But now, the utter joy of that message was somewhat forgotten – they’d let the secular lifestyles around them and the philosophies of the day dampen the spectacular, earth-shaking news that Jesus had died for them and that they have been made right with God.

His message to the Corinthians needs to be made to us, too. Every Christian needs to be reminded of that simple, Gospel Truth: Jesus died for you, and He rose from the dead. If you’ve been a believer all your life like I am, put yourself in your neighbor’s shoes and imagine the utter despair of not knowing that Jesus lives.

If Jesus hadn’t risen, Paul writes, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” How much of today’s society believes just that? “Death is a peaceful release from the suffering of life,” they say. “Enjoy everything now, while you can, because there are no toys in heaven.” That’s not a conclusion anyone wants to come to about life and death. What a hopeless belief! But, without knowing Jesus, the future is bleak. “Life is meaningless; death is the end.”

That’s why Christian churches are known by names like “Resurrection”, “Prince of Peace”, “Lord of Life”, “Our Savior”, and “Hope”. Paul knew it – so do we: In fact, “**Christ has been raised from the dead!**” He came to bring life, and bring it abundantly. We have purpose in this life – sharing this Good News and giving glory to God through our living. And we have an even better eternal life in store for us. Christians don’t die, they “fall asleep”, awaiting the Last Day when their glorified bodies will rejoin their souls in heaven. Your baptism is when your eternal life began.

“Christ is Risen, He is risen indeed, Alleluia!”

We pray: This joyful Eastertide Away with sin and sorrow! My love, the Crucified, Has sprung to life this mornow: Had Christ, who once was slain, Not burst His three-day prison, Our faith had been in vain: But now has Christ arisen, arisen, arisen; But now has Christ arisen! *Alleluia*, Amen. LSB 482

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, June 3, 2024

Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-49

What Will Heaven Be Like?

At some point in life, everyone wonders about this question. What will it be like? What will I be like? Who will I know? Will my dog be in heaven?

Some of the questions that we ask have answers in the Scriptures. What will heaven be like? There will be no pain. No tears. No sin. No death. These answers are wonderful to confess and yet impossible for us to truly understand. All of our days are touched by sin, pain, tears, and death. Scripture tells us that we will be with Christ and the multitudes who have gone before us in the faith. A new heavens and new earth will certainly include the things of this earth (including cats and dogs). Will your particular dog or cat be in eternity? That answer is not clear. And as far as knowing others in heaven, certainly we will know those we have known, just notice how the disciples recognize the Risen and yet transformed Jesus. As for those we haven't known, the Transfiguration of Jesus gives us a preview of the glories of heaven and it seems the disciples know Moses and Elijah without asking or name tags. This could be from listening to their conversation with Jesus or because they just know. For a fuller answer, we have to wait.

What will we be like? Paul tells us a bit. We will be very much the same and yet totally different – having a heavenly body. This body will be imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual. I can't say that I know exactly what all of that means, except that it will be amazing. But perhaps most telling is the last sentence from our reading today, "just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven" (1 Cor. 15:49). You'll be like the Risen Jesus. Again, I don't know all that this means, but I can't imagine a better promise.

Prayer: Risen Jesus, You have opened heaven to us. While we do not fully comprehend all that it will entail, I am eagerly awaiting the day when the promise of my baptism will be realized completely and share fully in Your everlasting life. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, June 4, 2024

Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Blessed Assurances

As time goes on, I become more and more aware that there is a limit to my time. As I become more aware of my physical limitations, as age and injury affect me, I appreciate more and more what God has promised me. God plans for the future far better than I do!

God lives with me and supports me. Nothing I go through must be retained alone, for He is with me. Like a shepherd He watches over me, making sure that I get what I need, providing for my wants as well as my must-haves.

But what really takes the cake, what continues to be so wonderful in His gifts lies in the future. God plans that my earthly habitation, this body of mine will be replaced with an imperishable body, making me no longer subject to aches and pains, no longer fearing that weariness will overcome me.

Now I don't understand what He means. The seed doesn't understand the flower that comes later. The beginning doesn't begin to comprehend an eternal future. So I take His promises and hold them tight to my heart. When the future seems grim, when I don't see a path through, I remind myself that there is glory ahead for me.

My mind quivers as I consider the level of what God has done for me. He rescued me from the prison of sin, from the enslavement to my bodily desires. But He adds more to it. He gives me a better future than I could even hope for here.

Prayer: Thank you, my LORD. You have done so much and continue to do more and more. Thank you for Your assurances. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, June 5, 2024

Read 1 Cor 14:26-40

Collection For the Saints

“And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your [χάρις - kharin] gift to Jerusalem.”

1 Corinthians 16:3

These *gracious gifts* (v. 3) Paul collected are the good works “**of the Lord**” (1 Cor 15:58) Jesus Christ for the poor saints in Jerusalem (v. 1, 3; cf. Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 8:1-9). This is not a binding covenantal command to tithe, but an encouragement and imperative to love God in loving your fellow neighbor saint--giving *gracious gifts* to the saints in need. (The NT speaks of “give/giving” over 200 times). Paul instructed Corinth “**as I directed the churches in Galatia**” (v. 1) and Macedonia as well as other churches to do this *gracious* good work “**you also are to do**” (v. 1).

When we Christians give *gifts/offerings* in the “collection plate” (digitally/envelop/check-cash/labor/donations), it may not cross our minds as to what and whom these *gracious gifts* are serving in the Lord Jesus Christ. All is the work of the Lord for the saints, impoverished, suffering, and every saint-Christian in need of sustaining and serving Christ’s Church. These *gifts* go to a wide variety of needs of the saints. E.g., Good works of the Church **today** are our *gracious gifts* to the saints in outreach efforts such as life pregnancy centers working to affirm life—pro-life (all ages) and to save preborn/born human lives in Jesus’ Name. Lives are changed daily in the work of the saints—the Lord Jesus turns hearts every day from evil works to true repentant faith through their efforts.

Good works in the Lord Jesus are done through our *gracious gifts*. Our Lord Jesus works through us, His people. Needs are many among all the saints in this sinful, broken, and redeemed world we live in here and now. So Paul encourages all Christians to give as we are able. How can we do anything (love) if we do not do anything (love) for each other?

This question “**concerning the collection for the saints**” (v. 1) Paul briefly addressed the Church in Corinth in this passage and suggested putting something aside the first day of the week (Sunday) as one is able (v. 2). An account of their *gracious gifts* were recorded in accredited letters, as to accountability was practiced among the saints as customary and proper so to do (v. 3). One thing the Church does not do and is not encouraged to do, is to lie, fraud, cheat, and steal among and from one another, but to love as Jesus the Christ, our Lord, God, King, and Savior, loved us. Jesus keeps us in His Righteousness, Grace, and Peace forever.

Prayer – Lord Jesus, You live and rule all things! All Your work is good for Your purposes; for our good and our benefit. Grant us faithful and gracious hearts and minds to give in Your love as we are able among Your Church, for Your Names’ sake. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, June 6, 2024
Read 1 Corinthians 16:5-11

If the Lord Permits

“I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits.” 1 Corinthians 16:5-11

You may be familiar with the old folk wisdom, “if you want to hear God laugh, just tell Him your plans.” There’s a slice of truth here. It’s an exercise in foolishness to think that we should be informing the Creator of heaven and earth as to how things should go from our limited perspective. His view is wider than we can imagine, and His intentions easily confound our very limited plans and desires.

On the other hand, here is Paul making plans. Yet I don’t think we are left to think that God would be laughing at the foolishness of Paul. So, is it good to plan or not? Is it foolish or not? Perhaps these are the wrong questions.

Paul is making plans to spend more time in Corinth. He is looking at the coming winter weather that would eventually make travel nearly impossible. He wants to spend meaningful time with the Christians in Corinth, not just “pass through.”

It is wise to make plans. It is foolish to insist they come to pass. It is wise to evaluate the resources that God gives to us and determine what appears to be the best course of action. It is foolish to be unbending in our determinations.

In other words, we should make plans, but always with humility. We recognize the outcomes of our plans (and the actual course of the future) is dependant not on our brilliance, but on the grace and mercy of the God who made us, who has made us new in Christ, and who leads us by His Spirit. We are truly wise to trust Him, especially when our plans are interrupted, for He has proven that His plan for us and our salvation is far greater than anything that we would devise.

Prayer: Lord of all, give to me true wisdom that comes from humbly trusting in You. Help me look to the future by holding tightly to Christ and loosely to my plans. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Friday, June 7, 2024

Read 1 Corinthians 16:13-14

Stand Firm

“13 Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. 14 Let all that you do be done in love.” (1 Corinthians 16:13-14 ESV).

In these two short verses Paul gives five points of instruction for the Corinthians, and I think that these five points are worth looking at a little bit more closely. Firstly, Paul tells the Corinthians to be watchful. Watchfulness is important for Christians, and it is probably something that we don't talk about enough. What Paul wants us to be watchful for is at least two things, sin in our lives and in the Church and then the coming of Christ.

Taking a moment to look at the latter I couldn't help but be reminded that Christ Himself said that He would come like a thief in the night and that we must be watchful for His coming. I know that in my own life, I don't always appreciate the reality that Christ could return before any of you even have the chance to read this devotion tomorrow. This reminder to be watchful leads us to the next point that Paul makes which is to remain faithful. Because Christ could come at any time it becomes important that we remain faithful all the time. This expectation for faithfulness then begs the question about how we are supposed to live faithfully which Paul answers by saying, “act like men.” There is certainly a way to read this that excludes the female half of the population but in this devotion, I take a broader view that this means that we are to act like proper humans which ultimately means acting like Christ the only perfect human. Christ was and is The Human. To act like a human means to follow the example of the only one who was a human perfectly. When we understand this, we can then begin to understand the last two parts of Paul's instructions, “be strong” and “let all that you do be done in love.”

If we keep Christ as our example and look at Him to see what strength and love look like we will find the answer to both in the cross. There is no greater show of strength or love than what is shown on Golgotha. The strength to have all power but not to use it and the love that brought Him to that moment and kept Him there are the most beautiful examples there are of strength and love, and He did it all for you. So read Paul's words again and apply them to yourself.

Prayer: Lord, help us to take Your servant Paul's words to heart and shape us through them so that we may live like You. Strengthen our faith so that we may endure to the end. In your name we pray. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson

Saturday, June 8, 2024

Read [1 Cor 16:19-24](#)

“Greetings, a Curse, a Prayer, and a Blessing”

Paul has finished his message. He’s exhorted the Corinthians to love one another, worship the Lord only, and to look to His grace. He’s pointed them to Christ’s resurrection, along with our future resurrections and eternal life in heaven. Paul described his travel plans and gave some final instructions. Now, highly unusually for Paul, he closes with nine short sentences. (Ordinarily, you risk unconsciousness by attempting to read aloud a single Pauline sentence with only one breath.)

At first, this reading struck me as a group of stray sentences he had left over from some of his writings. Like my title for this devotion, a whole array of seemingly separate ideas fills this closing. But, in light of Paul’s message for the Christians in Corinth, they come together quite well.

Paul reminds them of their membership in the Universal Church by sending greetings from the other churches in Roman Asia. “Hearty greetings” come from all those who worship together in the house of Paul’s good friends, Aquila and Prisca, fellow tent-makers, and Jewish Christians. “All the brothers,” presumably the Christians of Ephesus from where Paul was writing, emphasizes this unity of all believers.

As this letter was probably read aloud to the Corinthian congregation, Paul’s encouragement to “Greet one another with a holy kiss” further encourages them to forgive one another, put their disagreements behind them, and to share this peace-inspired practice that continues in many churches today. Then, Paul, in his way, points out that these final words are penned by his own hand. “Yes, this is my message for you,” he says.

Recalling the hard message of turning away from former sins to follow God and to then live accordingly, Paul again plainly states the consequence of separating yourself from God, “If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed.” God is love and wants all to be saved, but coming to church while your heart lives elsewhere doesn’t end well.

Paul’s prayer immediately follows the curse, pointing to the joy awaiting Christians on the Last Day, but the judgment that he spoke of for unbelievers. “Maranatha!” or, “Our Lord, come!” Paul spoke in his native Aramaic this common Christian prayer. Just as John closed the Bible in his Revelation, we, too pray, “Come Lord Jesus!”

Until that Last Day, though, Paul (and Jesus) has hope for the weak in faith. Christians must be optimists, knowing that the God that loved me enough to turn me from sin and death to knowing Him and loving my neighbor, has grace sufficient to save the world. With Paul we pray his final words,

“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.”

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, June 3, 2024

Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-49

What Will Heaven Be Like?

At some point in life, everyone wonders about this question. What will it be like? What will I be like? Who will I know? Will my dog be in heaven?

Some of the questions that we ask have answers in the Scriptures. What will heaven be like? There will be no pain. No tears. No sin. No death. These answers are wonderful to confess and yet impossible for us to truly understand. All of our days are touched by sin, pain, tears, and death. Scripture tells us that we will be with Christ and the multitudes who have gone before us in the faith. A new heavens and new earth will certainly include the things of this earth (including cats and dogs). Will your particular dog or cat be in eternity? That answer is not clear. And as far as knowing others in heaven, certainly we will know those we have known, just notice how the disciples recognize the Risen and yet transformed Jesus. As for those we haven't known, the Transfiguration of Jesus gives us a preview of the glories of heaven and it seems the disciples know Moses and Elijah without asking or name tags. This could be from listening to their conversation with Jesus or because they just know. For a fuller answer, we have to wait.

What will we be like? Paul tells us a bit. We will be very much the same and yet totally different – having a heavenly body. This body will be imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual. I can't say that I know exactly what all of that means, except that it will be amazing. But perhaps most telling is the last sentence from our reading today, "just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven" (1 Cor. 15:49). You'll be like the Risen Jesus. Again, I don't know all that this means, but I can't imagine a better promise.

Prayer: Risen Jesus, You have opened heaven to us. While we do not fully comprehend all that it will entail, I am eagerly awaiting the day when the promise of my baptism will be realized completely and share fully in Your everlasting life. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, June 11, 2024

Read 2 Corinthians 1:12-24

Blessed Assurances

With great joy, I consider those others with whom I worship, talk, and share life. There are those in my direct family. I am able to support their life with Jesus by encouragement or even, at times, education. We can read the Bible together, and sharing insights, we can learn from each other. Thus our LORD teaches each of us to live in Him, making His Word part of our daily lives. I so appreciate what God has given me - both to receive and to give.

And then there are more since I don't live in a desert community. I have friends, acquaintances, co-workers, and more. And here too I am thrilled when God teaches me, or when He opens a door for me to serve another. I don't find opportunities to serve others often. People want to be secure in doing themselves. But when they need help, even just a word, then I find God letting me do the help for Him. Again, I am so blessed by those others around me.

I can't do it on my own. When I try, it all backfires on me, then I am not helping others but seeking glory for myself. Then I am forced to recognize my own need, need to repent and seek God in prayer. He does help, He does forgive but always on this life I fail Him. So over and over again, even when He is letting me serve him with others, I find my strength in Him. Strength to deny myself and thrill at serving Him through others.

Prayer: Thank you God for giving me so many sharing times with others. Help me to enjoy them and not look for myself in them. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, June 12, 2024

Read 2 Corinthians 2:1-4

Love, Pain, Joy

“For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.”

2 Corinthians 2:4

The Apostle Paul decided not to make another painful and sorrowful visit to the church in Corinth. Paul previously sent Timothy (1 Cor 4:17; 16:10) to the Corinthian church. Paul wrote here, **“For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you. For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained?”** (v.1, 2). Paul does not want to make a painful visit to the church, the ones who bring him gladness and joy. Paul later wrote that he feared he would find them again as before in unrepentant quarreling, disorder, and sexual immorality (2 Cor 12:20-21). Paul certainly was joyed by the church and, at the same time, painfully grieved.

Grief and painful sorrow, like Paul’s spirit, come from his love for his fellow brothers and sisters. Sin always causes pain and grief. Sin not only brings pain and sorrow to ourselves, but it casts sorrow into others whom we love and who love us. We see Paul’s love, joy, and grief here over the church in Corinth.

In the previous letter Paul wrote in love and apostolic authority (see 1 Cor 1-1-3; 2 Cor 1:1-2). **“And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all”** (v. 3). The grief of the church is Paul’s grief and the joy of the church is Paul’s joy. Paul is bound to the church in the Gospel, and the church here is bound to Paul in the Gospel. This joy is the love and joy of the work of God in their hearts in the Good News—The Gospel of forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ Jesus. Paul calls their hearts back to the joy of the Gospel.

Paul’s previous letter grieved the Corinthian church, and he was glad they were grieved into repentance. **“For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you”** (v. 4). We will have pain and sorrow here and now. Yet, we have love and joy in the Gospel promise of Jesus Christ as heirs to the eternal Kingdom of God. God’s love for you is given in the pain and sorrow and blood of Jesus. We, too, will suffer pain, joy, and love in our hearts as Jesus loved us with pain and joy of heart.

Prayer – Lord Jesus, grant us true repentance and sincere love for one another. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, June 13, 2024
Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

Not Outwitted By Satan

“Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.” 1 Corinthians 16:5-11

Satan is no dummy. As Paul reminds us in our reading today, Satan is constantly seeking ways to outwit us. Here Paul is talking about how Satan is working to undermine our faith and the integrity of the church by encouraging us to withhold forgiveness.

One of Satan’s great tools in temptation is to divert our attention. Christ would have us focus our attention on Him: His goodness in creation, His unbounded forgiveness by His death and resurrection, His kindness in making us His people. Focusing on such things through His Spirit, leads us into lives of gratitude, shared forgiveness (even though this can be hard), and kindness as we’ve been shown kindness by the gracious hand of God.

Satan would always turn our focus toward ingratitude for what we don’t have, harshness towards those who don’t do what we want, and (in today’s text) unforgiveness toward those who wrong us. How does Satan do this? By constantly encouraging us to remember the hurt, focus on the harm, fixate on it, and never let it out of our sight.

When we are genuinely harmed, this is easy to do. We can’t just instantly forget the pain. Plus, we tend to remember every instance of harshness far more easily than anything else. When such pain keeps cycling through your mind, it will do little good to tell yourself, “forget about it.” Satan will quickly encourage you to fill the void with memories of the pain. Christ invites us instead to remember Him. Be renewed in the forgiveness of Christ for you. Recall all that He has forgiven you. Focus your attention on Him. This won’t erase pain, but it will shape Your heart, and reorient your heart toward Christ and His mercy.

Prayer: Merciful Lord, I know that Satan is constantly designing my spiritual harm – both to hurt me and Your people. He wants me to cling to resentment and bitterness, but in Christ, You give forgiveness, peace, and gratitude. Grant to me a forgiving heart, shaped by Your forgiveness. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Friday, June 14, 2024

Read 2 Corinthians 2:14-15

Triumphal Procession

“14 But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. 15 For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.” (2 Corinthians 2:14-15 ESV).

In church we often walk in in a procession on special days. The most well-known processions in church are probably ones that happen on days like Palm Sunday or on Easter when we remember Christ’s life and the work that He did while He was on earth. But there are other processions that we do and one thing that they all have in common is triumph. We are always celebrating the victory that Christ has won and processions are part of how we do that. There is a procession of sorts when a person is brought to the front of the church to be baptized and parents and sponsors come up with them and the whole congregation watches. There is a procession at the beginning of weddings when those who are celebrating a new couple come in and take their places to watch the couple take their wedding vows before God. We even have processions at funerals, and these are a display of triumph as well. They are triumphant processions because the Christian who died is with Christ and the rest of the saints who are victorious forever. These are all times when the triumph of Christ is being proclaimed to the world by the Church but there are other times too.

Whenever Christians go out into their daily lives and serve their neighbors in their vocations, they are actually proclaiming the victory of Christ. We demonstrate the power that Christ has in us when we act righteously wherever God has placed us. We become an “aroma of Christ” among those around us, both the believers and the nonbelievers. As Christians in the world, we are a light to the world so that others can know about Jesus and hopefully come to faith in Him. We are able to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere we go and as we do we invite others to join in the triumph that is already ours through Christ.

Prayer: Lord of Victory, thank you for leading us in a joyful procession as we walk toward eternal life with You. Help us to be a pleasing fragrance that will proclaim Your glory. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson

Saturday, June 15, 2024

Read [2 Cor 3:1-6](#)

“Letters from Christ”

Writing letters is a skill and practice of another time. People used to write to one another, using a pen on paper, to communicate. People actually practiced “penmanship”, painstakingly manipulating a writing utensil, so their handwriting would be a thing of beauty as well as a way to express their heartfelt thoughts. But today, we “text”. We send “selfies”; we post “memes” on social media. Nothing wrong with that, but, when digging through some old boxes in the basement and coming across an old, handwritten love letter – Wow!

Wouldn’t it be great to get a letter from Jesus? What would that even look like? Paul tells us, **“You show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”** Wow!

In the past, people would write “chain-mail” – a letter they’d write and send to someone else, who would add to it and send on to another, and so on. Paul is saying that that’s how Jesus works. His Spirit writes His Gospel message on someone’s heart, and that person brings it to another, it spreads, and comes to High Ridge, 2,000 years later.

And what makes this message valid? Is it the personal integrity of the pastor who baptized you? The mother and father that raised you? No, while those people in our lives are priceless treasures, the Gospel is written in us by the Spirit, through such people. Paul would say, again and again, that he was the chief of sinners. The worst sinner, because he persecuted Christ’s church. But despite that, you should listen to him because he is a letter from Christ, bearing the Gospel to you.

This life-giving, life-saving message comes in strange looking letters. Paul was an odd messenger himself, but Christ keeps sending them. Six months ago, He sent a letter that is weird, but beautiful at the same time.

Hulk Hogan, the former WWE wrestler and entertainer, was baptized. He’d come to faith when he was 14, but was distracted by life until last December, when he was washed by the Spirit and now sounds a lot like Paul when talking about it:

“Now that I am one with God, the main event theme of surrender, service and love makes me the Real Main Event that can slam any giant of any size through the power of my Lord and Savior and so it is, even now brother, AMEN!”



We pray: Holy Spirit, You wrote Your Gospel message on my heart when You entered me at baptism. Live within me that that life-saving message is heard by those around me who see You in me. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, June 17, 2024

Read 2 Corinthians 3:7-18

What Will Heaven Be Like?

“We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” 2 Cor. 3:18

Twice in recent years, we have turned our eyes heavenward with ridiculous glasses on our faces. In order to catch a glimpse of the total (or near total) solar eclipses, anyone who wanted to look needed special glasses. Why? To gaze on such brightness could blind you.

When Moses would leave the Old Testament Tabernacle after speaking with God, his face shone with God’s glory. But as Paul reminds us, this was too much for God’s people to look upon. He had veiled the reflected glory.

But through faith in Christ, everything is changed. “The veil is removed” (v. 17) By God’s mercy in Christ, we are transformed day by day in God’s Word of forgiveness and life in Jesus. The glory of God is not veiled, in fact, we reflect it!

Instead of needing protective eyewear in the presence of the holy God, cloaked in His forgiveness, we become mirrors reflecting the glorious mercy of Jesus in our words and actions.

Prayer: Glorious and gracious Jesus, as You have transformed us by the light of Your Gospel, may Your glorious mercy be reflected in our words and actions. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, June 18, 2024
Read 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

Living in Faith

God is a God of clarity, of transparency. He does not hide what He is doing, nor does He work in sneaky ways. Rather He tells me in His Word what He is doing with me and how He operates in the world. He certainly doesn't do things the way I want to do them.

Feeling weak and vulnerable in this world, I would rather be quiet, and let everyone misunderstand me so that what I do will not be noticed and so not subject to the world's opposition. But God keeps telling me, "No, that's not the way I operate. You," He says, "You trust me so little!." Ouch, I remember reading about the disciples in the boat. How Jesus corrected them, telling them to have more faith.

He is talking to me. He is telling me that He can do it. My fear gets in the way of my faith. If I act on my faith, then I know that He will use what I have done. Now He might use it differently from my expectations! But He will use those actions, partly to build my faith.

Acting in faith, living in faith, will build that trust in God into the core of my life. So He wants me to live in Him and in living in Him, let that faith and trust act. There will never be a failure in what He does through me, just not me deciding what that success is. How blessed it is to trust Him!

Prayer: Thank you again, LORD, Thank you for building the faith that lets me act in your ways, transparently and clearly. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, June 19, 2024

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-12

Power Belongs to God and Not to Us

“We are afflicted in every way ... always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.”

2 Corinthians 4:8a, 10

Paul calls the Light of the glory of God in Christ that shines in our hearts **“this treasure in jars of [ὄστρακίνοις, ὄστρακινῶς – earthen (ware) vessels, clay], to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us”** (v. 7). The earthly temporal bodies we have are called, earthen vessels; Earthen vessels that carry the body of the crucified and risen Christ—the glory and power of God. This treasure shows that all the glory of the apostolic ministry of Paul and Christian ministry is all God’s power and not ours.

Paul says of sufferings, **“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies”** (vv. 8-10). In weakness, the power of God is at work (revealed/manifest) in us (our bodies) for the sake of the crucified and risen Christ. In weakness, suffering, and death, the life of Jesus is manifest in us. All things are becoming new in Christ, and the glory to come is the hope that outweighs the momentary affliction in these earthen vessels—jars of clay. This treasure shows **“that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us”** (v. 7).

In suffering, God’s power is made perfect in Christ Jesus. The wisdom and power of God is revealed in the body of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ for our salvation. Paul continued, **“For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you”** (vv. 11-12). The life of Jesus and the surpassing power and glory of God is given to you in your Baptism and at work in you every day. Suffering reveals Jesus’ life in our mortal bodies, as we have everlasting life, forgiveness, and salvation in Jesus. We wait for the hope of the new resurrected bodily life to come in the eternal heavenly home. You have Jesus’ Light and life in your entire being. Jesus is the treasure you carry today in your mortal bodies—this shows that the surpassing power always belongs to God and not to us.

Prayer – Lord Jesus. Your surpassing power is a Light and treasure revealed in our mortal flesh, and renewed with Your eternal life we carry in Your death and resurrection. Help us in our weakness and suffering. Glory belongs to You, O Jesus, for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, June 13, 2024
Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

Not Outwitted By Satan

“Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.” 1 Corinthians 16:5-11

Satan is no dummy. As Paul reminds us in our reading today, Satan is constantly seeking ways to outwit us. Here Paul is talking about how Satan is working to undermine our faith and the integrity of the church by encouraging us to withhold forgiveness.

One of Satan’s great tools in temptation is to divert our attention. Christ would have us focus our attention on Him: His goodness in creation, His unbounded forgiveness by His death and resurrection, His kindness in making us His people. Focusing on such things through His Spirit, leads us into lives of gratitude, shared forgiveness (even though this can be hard), and kindness as we’ve been shown kindness by the gracious hand of God.

Satan would always turn our focus toward ingratitude for what we don’t have, harshness towards those who don’t do what we want, and (in today’s text) unforgiveness toward those who wrong us. How does Satan do this? By constantly encouraging us to remember the hurt, focus on the harm, fixate on it, and never let it out of our sight.

When we are genuinely harmed, this is easy to do. We can’t just instantly forget the pain. Plus, we tend to remember every instance of harshness far more easily than anything else. When such pain keeps cycling through your mind, it will do little good to tell yourself, “forget about it.” Satan will quickly encourage you to fill the void with memories of the pain. Christ invites us instead to remember Him. Be renewed in the forgiveness of Christ for you. Recall all that He has forgiven you. Focus your attention on Him. This won’t erase pain, but it will shape Your heart, and reorient your heart toward Christ and His mercy.

Prayer: Merciful Lord, I know that Satan is constantly designing my spiritual harm – both to hurt me and Your people. He wants me to cling to resentment and bitterness, but in Christ, You give forgiveness, peace, and gratitude. Grant to me a forgiving heart, shaped by Your forgiveness. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Friday, June 21, 2024

Read 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Will the Tent Last?

“4 For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5 He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given the Spirit as a guarantee. 6 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” 2 Corinthians 5:4-7

I was in Boy Scouts all through middle and high school which meant that I went on a lot of camping trips growing up. When I first started going on these camping trips, I was still pretty young and I would get super homesick, almost to the point of not wanting to go to camp at all. The homesickness went away after three or four camping trips, but I still remember how much I dreaded being away from home those first few times. In this text we see something similar. Paul speaks to how we are all in tents and we are all just like little kids who want so badly to be home when they are homesick. We all know that things aren't quite right, and we can all feel that there is something more than what we can see now. This is why Paul can say that we are walking by faith and not by sight. What we see isn't the end all be all of what God has prepared for us. To carry on the camping analogy, we can say that God has blazed a new trail through Christ. Christ gives us a home and the way to get there. Which means that we can have “good courage” just like Paul says because we know that we are on our way home. The new home that Christ gives us is going to be so much greater than the tent that we find ourselves in now. Just like Dr. Oschwald said in his sermon last Sunday, we sometimes wonder if our current tents are going to hold up. We wonder if we will make it through to the end, but we can be confident that the new home that Christ has given us will never wear out or grow old. When we get homesick for our eternal home we can remember the promises of Christ for us and take comfort in the fact that we are already on our way to Him.

Prayer: Lord, lead us to that new home which you have prepared for us. Help us to be of good courage while we are here in this world so that we may better share Your love and live as You would have us live. Finally, we pray that You would bring us to be at home with You forever. In Your name we pray, Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson

Saturday, June 22, 2024

Read [2 Cor 5:11-21](#)

“New Creations”

As I began to prepare to write this devotion, I felt the weight of the worries of the world pulling me down. Yesterday, I got another shot in my back to make the pain lessen, but it’s still there a little, and I’ll need another shot soon. I’d made the mistake of watching the news yesterday, and as you know, the headlines are full of corrupt leaders, human traffickers, war, and injustice. Everyone in the family shared their troubles when I came home from work, and the stress was high for all.

Then, I dug into the text. Thoughts of life’s problems continued to go through my mind though, and fought with the Scripture before me. Gradually, though, the miraculous story shone through all my troubles, and God’s amazing salvation brightened my mind. What Paul is talking about here is the Christian’s response to the Gospel and reminded me of the [Prodigal Son story](#).

You remember, he was the ungrateful son who couldn’t wait for his father to die to demand his inheritance. He continued to disrespect his dad, wasting his money on disgraceful living that he knew dad wouldn’t approve of. Finally, that all ran out and he was left penniless, with no friends, eating the food the pigs wouldn’t eat, just to stay alive.

“Prodigal” obviously hadn’t feared his father before, but now only barely prayed that dad would take him back as a common servant. He had his fingers crossed at that meager hope, when he was blown away by dad’s boundless love. His dad dressed him in fine clothes, put his ring on his finger, and threw him a party that outshone all the parties he’d previously bought with his dad’s money.

This is what was going through Paul’s mind as he wrote this. No, not the Prodigal Son, but he, Paul – the former Chief of Sinners. After all, Jesus had come to him when he was persecuting His Church and had forgiven him and given him the ministry of sharing this Gospel.

Paul could not boast of anything within himself – God came to him when he actively fought God with violence and murder! He saw, now, that his total unworthiness and weakness was what made the glory of God’s love shine through him. He knew that by himself, he was empty, powerless, and dead. But God sent him Jesus, who died for him and clothed him in Jesus’ righteousness.

Yes, life was hard, painful, and got him down again and again. But Jesus kept coming back to him and filling him with hope and life and energizing him to go and be an “Ambassador for Christ,” bringing to others the message of reconciliation with our Father, through His Son. He’s not just brought us back into His household as servants; He has made us sons and daughters to rule His kingdom with Him.

We pray: Loving Father, when the world gets me down, fill me with joy and hope by remembering the immeasurable Love that You showed me on the Cross. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, June 24, 2024

Read 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Now is the Day of Salvation

Wow! Consider all the things Paul and his fellow ministers went through for the sake of the Gospel! 3 times in this letter he gives us lists of all the difficulties.

But Paul isn't saying, "Look at me!" in the hardships he cites. He's saying, "Look at Him in whom I'm grounded." He knew how God had appeared to him on the Damascus road and had transformed him from a persecutor of the church to a proclaimer of the Gospel (see Acts 9). And he knew this same God was present in every circumstance, empowering him to face each day in faith, regardless of yesterday's ordeals. As Paul put it in Philippians 3, "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 of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13b-14).

And as for you and me? This is our victory song, too. When life bombards us on all sides, step back; catch your breath. By faith in Christ, you have been changed, redeemed from the world so you can let others know that today, this day, is the day of their salvation. Whether today includes difficulty or celebration (and Paul's life, like ours, included a bunch of both), the true foundation in everytime is that salvation in ours in Christ now.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the great endurance You give us to share Your Son with others. In His Name we pray. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, June 25, 2024

Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

True Friends

There are many ways in which I, who am a friend of Jesus, could get together with other people. Obvious is marriage but there are also business relationships, sports relations, hobby favorites, and so on. But when I share my life with another, then I share part of what is important to me, Jesus. This works wonderfully that other one and myself are both Jesus' friends; but if that other one is not a friend of Jesus, then they will always want and try to get between me and Jesus.

I, then, am faced with the question: Who is more important to me? Jesus or this other friend. I am tempted and tormented by the fact that that other friend has brought their ungodliness into me and now I must leave one friend or the other.

It hurts to turn away from a friend, and the closer you have become the harder it is to turn away. And yet, there is no friend closer or more important than my Savior Jesus. And so, building a close friend who is not one of Jesus' friends, leads surely to a broken heart - as that ungodliness, even something originally unseen, will force me away from them.

How many times I cry to God looking for people who seek Him, who love Him, who are also interested in me, seeking to be a partner with me in this life. But while it feels so hopeless in the world, God is with me, and does guide me to others. As usual, I need patience, and He provides.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for bringing me true friends, friends who also love you. And also thank you for breaking up those other false friends. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, June 26, 2024

Read 2 Corinthians 7:2-9

Boasting, Comfort, Joy, Grief, Repentance and Rejoicing

“I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together.”

2 Corinthians 7:3

Paul continues to appeal to the Corinthians to open their hearts to them (Paul, Timothy and Titus) as they have wronged no one. The church at Corinth is in their hearts **“to die together and to live together”** (v. 3). In Christ alone, we die and live together in His death and resurrection and have fellowship.

Paul is bold and boasts in his confidence toward the Corinthians and is comforted in the report of Titus’ visit to them and is overflowed **“with joy”** (v. 4) in all their afflictions together. Paul rejoiced and is comforted by God in Titus’ comfort he received by the Corinthian church, who longed for fellowship with Paul.

Paul’s letter grieved the Corinthians, and he did not regret it because this grief was grieving that led to repentance—**“godly grief”** (v.9) over their sins that turned their hearts to true faith in the crucified and risen Christ, in Whom, we all die and live together.

“As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us” (v. 9)

Dr. Mark Seifrid comments on this verse, “[T]he Corinthians were “grieved to repentance.” They were “grieved according to God.” That is to say, their grief was worked by God and rested in his hand. It had its time, but that time came to an end in their change of heart. Just as the Corinthians have been instruments of God in the life of the apostle, the apostle has proved to be the instrument of God in the life of the Corinthians. “Through us,” he says, “you were grieved according to God.” This took place so that the Corinthians might not suffer loss in any way. The healing that God works through wounding is complete and whole. God wills to restore us, not destroy us, even though he must perform the latter in order to accomplish the former. That is the essence of salvation: we must be stripped of our idols and given the true God.”

Prayer – Lord Jesus, strip from our heart's all idolatries and open our hearts to the Truth. Grant us true repentance and faith, and to rejoice in You and Your church together, always. For Your Name’s sake. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, June 27, 2024
Read 2 Corinthians 7:10-16

Godly vs. Worldly Grief

“For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.” 1 Corinthians 16:5-11

As Paul continues his discussion of godly grief (over sin), in today’s reading he contrasts it with worldly grief over sin.

But what’s the difference?

The difference is the difference between Judas and Peter.

When Judas looked at the horror of his sin in betraying Jesus, he was repulsed.

When Peter looked at the horror of his sin in denying Jesus, he was repulsed.

So far, no difference. But their reaction reveals the difference.

Peter descended into tears and sorrow knowing the God alone could forgive and restore him, which is exactly what Christ did. You can read all about that in John 21. Such godly grief over sin recognizes the disgusting nature of our sin, confesses it, and, by faith, knows that God alone is our help and that he forgives.

Judas in his sorrow did not look to God, but sought to settle the score himself. Whether in depression, desperation, or from a misplaced sense of honor, Judas wrongly believes he can cover his own sins – and in a very literal way his “world grief produces death.”

The bottom line is that we should take our sin seriously. We should grieve the many ways we harm one another and also betray and deny our God, but also know only One can cover such sin. Only One can pay for such sin. And He has done it in full. Grieve your sin, but also run to Jesus and know that in Him, you are forgiven and restored.

Prayer: Lord, give me a godly grief that openly confesses my sin and joyfully receives Your word of forgiveness for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Friday, June 28, 2024

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-7

Abundance of Joy

“1 We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, 2 for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. 3 For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord,” (2 Corinthians 8:1-3 ESV).

I sometimes wonder how Paul would describe the churches that are around today if he were to come for a visit. I wonder what words he would pick if he were writing to someone about us? In this text he writes to the Corinthians about the churches in Macedonia and the words that he uses to describe them are “abundance of joy,” and “wealth of generosity.” The Corinthian church was famously messy and Paul thought that it would be beneficial for them to hear about the example that was being set by these other churches. I think that we can also learn from these churches. We may not be in the midst of a “severe test of affliction” like those churches were, but it is still a wonderful thing to be encouraged by the conduct of other Christians. When Christians are able to live in the joy that is theirs through Christ it is inspiring. We love to hear about the faithfulness and joy of others and to cheer them on as they fight the good fight. Watching others be joyful can be very encouraging but, it is one thing to watch others be joyful, but it is something else entirely to be joyful yourself. We all want to be joyful but being joyful is a challenge. It’s no coincidence that Christ tells His followers that following Him looks like taking up a cross. Joy can be hard, but we have been given something that we can always be joyful about. Christ has given us Himself. We have received the greatest gift ever and when we remember the difference that the gift of Christ makes for us in our lives it should make us joyful. Christ gave according to His means and even beyond His means by giving up even His life on the cross all so that now we can live in joy and faithfulness which in turn leads us to give of ourselves too. Christ is the greatest gift, and He is a gift that is meant to be shared, so share the gift and do it in a variety of ways. Give the Word to others and give other things as you are able because of the joy that is yours through Christ.

Prayer: Father thank you for the gift that is Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ. Be with us in this life and help us to be joyful and to share the gifts that we have been given with those that You have placed around us. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson

Saturday, June 29, 2024

Read [2 Cor 8:8-15](#)

“Charity”

We Lutherans preach “Only Grace! Only Scripture! Only Faith!” While those are essential foundations on which our hope stands firm, there is another essential part of the Christian life. Those three have to do with the source of our salvation. Once we move past that into how we live as Christians, we quickly find the concept of Charity.

In the ESV translation of the Bible, “charity” only appears once. In Acts 9:36, we encounter Dorcas, who was “full of good works and acts of charity.” So why is charity an essential part of our lives? Maybe that word isn’t used much, but charity goes all the way back. God, knowing that His people would one day appreciate a beautiful sunset, charitably created the sun. Old Testament Law, handed down to Moses, included requirements that farmers would leave remnants of the harvest on the ground in their fields, that the poor and destitute could eat.

Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan to show who a good neighbor is and what he or she does. That outcast from Jewish society, unlike the Priest and the Levite, crossed over to help the dying victim of robbery. He “had compassion” on the one in need. He cared for him, nurtured him, and, when he had to continue on his trip, paid the innkeeper “whatever you need” to restore the stranger. Jesus took this example a giant leap further, when He charitably gave His life on the cross to save ours.

In today’s reading, Paul explains three reasons why we, too, should practice charity.

1. To follow the examples of so many Christians who’ve given the shirts off their backs for their neighbors.
2. Out of thanksgiving for all that God has given us, to give to the Church and our neighbors to share God’s blessings with them.
3. As a reminder of Jesus, Who exchanged His righteous life to save our sinful ones.

Acts of charity help everyone involved. To the person who received help changing their flat tire, they get a working car and through this rare, selfless act, see a glimpse of God’s love for His world. The one being charitable is drawn closer to Jesus in the process of taking small steps in His footprints. And, as the rest of the world drives by, some are reminded by witnessing charity occur, that there’s something special going on here that may be worth investigating.

We pray: Charitable God, make me to emulate Your love for Your Creation by being charitable to my neighbor. And, if I’m on the receiving end of another’s charity, make me recognize You in their gift. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, July 1, 2024

Read 2 Corinthians 8:16-24

The Importance of Integrity

Whenever anybody turns up out of the blue, previously unknown, we are naturally cautious...or at least we should be. Scam artists and charlatans did not begin with the internet, in fact, they go back to Satan in the Garden of Eden selling Adam and Eve a false bill of goods.

This understandable concern over someone they didn't know (Titus) seems to be what's behind our reading for today. So, Paul sends along two other Christians who must have been known in the area, as a means of confirmation.

Why does Paul go to such lengths as he sent this letter? He doesn't want the Corinthians to be in any doubt. Titus and his companions are genuine workers for the gospel and are to be trusted completely. They are not in any way, shape or form, out for their own interests, encouraging the Corinthians to give so that they can skip some off the top for themselves.

In other words, even while inviting the Corinthians to join in giving to support others and the preaching of the gospel, Paul's first concern IS the preaching of the gospel. He doesn't want to do anything that might undermine the message of salvation in Christ by raising any doubts about those (like Titus) who preach. It's one more example of him wanting to remove any obstacle that could get in the way of the most important thing: the forgiveness of Jesus.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to remove any obstacle that would ever give the impression that we are untrustworthy messengers. Help the message of free forgiveness in Jesus alone to shine through us at all times. In His Jesus' we pray. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, July 2, 2024

Read 2 Corinthians 9:1-5

Control and Trust

I think about how our God shares with us - life, provisions, friends, etc. And then also adds His life in Jesus. Sharing seems to be a chief characteristic of God. But I find myself being scared of being that like God. Sharing comes easy when I think I have plenty - but so often...

I have what God has provided for me, plenty indeed. But I look to the future, and I don't have sufficient provision already for all times. I know I need to trust my God, who, after all, provided what I do have now; but when I look ahead I worry. How I worry! The future might bring trouble - I'm not ready. Maybe I overlooked something. Or sometimes, I look in pride, saying, "I have saved up enough".

And then I realize. I want to trust my LORD. I want to let Him take care of me. But then my worry steps in. How I am tempted, tempted to try to insist on my desires, on Him doing things my way. There comes a time when my worries must end. There comes a time for me to turn to God, pleading with Him to calm my soul, to ease my worries. It's not that I don't trust Him. It's just so hard to not trust myself instead.

He is faithful. God doesn't fail to provide for me. The problem lies in my selfish desire to KNOW, to control by knowledge in other words, I keep wanting to be God for my life, rejecting Him. Stop me, Lord! And He does.

Prayer: Forgive me, Jesus, for wanting to control my life. I would rather let You take over, please, don't let me throw you away. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, July 3, 2024
Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

God's Indescribable Gift

“As it is written, ‘He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.’”
2 Corinthians 9:9

Paul described the cheerful gladness of giving graciously to others as God gives to us graciously. The gracious joy of giving comes from the indescribable gift of God in Christ Jesus. Paul is encouraging the Corinthian church in their giving, to supply **“the needs of the saints ... overflowing in many thanksgiving to God”** (v. 12). Paul drew from Psalm 112:9 in verse 9 of the one who fears Yahweh God; **“He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.”** The one who has done this for us perfectly is Jesus Christ. Paul describes what God does for us and through us. God gives us abundant grace and righteousness through Jesus Christ—our giving completely depends on God, Who gave us His grace and righteousness freely and graciously.

Paul wrote, **“The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver”** (vv. 6-7).

The *Lutheran Confessions* drew from Scripture and Paul's encouragement to the church at Corinth and to the entire Christian church, speaking on the “necessary” and the “necessity” of good works in the **“heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion,”**

“Here, however, this difference must also be kept in mind: that it should be understood when the word “necessary” is used, it should not be understood as coercion but only as the order of the unchangeable will of God, to which we are bound. God's command also indicates this when it enjoins the creature to obey its Creator. In other cases (as in 2 Cor. 9[:7], in the Epistle of Saint Paul to Philemon, and in 1 Peter 5[:2]), “from necessity” means what is wrung from people against their will, through coercion or in some other way, that they act outwardly, as a pretense, but indeed without and against their own will. For God does not want to have such hypocritical works. Instead, the people of the New Testament are supposed to be a willing people (Ps. 110[:3]), and “to sacrifice with a [voluntary] will” (Ps. 54[:6]), not reluctantly or under compulsion, “but from obedient hearts” (2 Cor. 9[:7]; Rom. 6[:17]). For “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9[:7]). In this sense and meaning it is right to say and teach that those whom the Son of God has freed do true good works freely or from a free and willing spirit.” (SD IV:17,18; *italics mine*).

Prayer – Lord Jesus, You are the indescribable gift of giving Yourself in taking our sin, guilt, and poverty upon Yourself and making us rich in Your grace as new creatures. Thank You, Lord, for Your inexpressible gift. Enable us always cheerfully to give as You give to us. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, July 4, 2024
Read 2 Corinthians 10:1-6

What the Weapons are For

“For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to Christ...” 2 Corinthians 10:5

One of the most beloved passages of Paul’s New Testament writings comes from Ephesians 6:10-20, as Paul describes the whole armor of God. In that passage, the elements of armor are overwhelmingly defensive, but there is one weapon: “the sword of the Spirit, the word of God” (Eph 6:17). In today’s reading, Paul points to what this weapon is for: to destroy false arguments and opinions and take our thoughts captive to Christ.

What is the Weapon of God’s Word For?

1. Destroy – The weapons given to the Christian are not against flesh and blood, but the weapons of God’s Word (in Law and Gospel) attack the faulty arguments of Satan. God’s Word roots out the false arguments of Satan not merely in others, but also in ourselves. The sword of the Spirit cuts us to the heart and leads us to recognize our sin and fall short of God’s glory. But this weapon of God’s Word also defeats Satan’s scheme to doubt the forgiveness of Christ. The Word of the Gospel cuts through the lies that God cannot forgive or will not forgive. The two-edged sword of God’s Word is the weapon that both attacks by exposing our sin, and cuts through the accusations of Satan with the peace of Christ.
2. Take Every Thought Captive – All our thoughts, opinions, intentions are to be shaped by Christ and His Word. Jesus spoke of following God and including that we love God “with all your mind.” Even before we take action or speak, God’s Word shapes how and what we speak. God’s Word shapes how and which actions we undertake. We should constantly ask:
 - a. What does God’s Word have to say (directly and indirectly) about the situation or topic in front of me?
 - b. How does the law of Christ direct me?
 - c. How does the forgiveness of Christ comfort me?

In just such ways, we take up the weapon of God’s Word – never to attack others! We take up God’s Word to attack the schemes of Satan that would tear us and others away from Christ.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, give me wisdom and strength to take up the weapon of Your Word to destroy every intention of Satan and take every thought captive to You, my Savior. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Friday, June 28, 2024

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-7

Abundance of Joy

“1 We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, 2 for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. 3 For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord,” (2 Corinthians 8:1-3 ESV).

I sometimes wonder how Paul would describe the churches that are around today if he were to come for a visit. I wonder what words he would pick if he were writing to someone about us? In this text he writes to the Corinthians about the churches in Macedonia and the words that he uses to describe them are “abundance of joy,” and “wealth of generosity.” The Corinthian church was famously messy and Paul thought that it would be beneficial for them to hear about the example that was being set by these other churches. I think that we can also learn from these churches. We may not be in the midst of a “severe test of affliction” like those churches were, but it is still a wonderful thing to be encouraged by the conduct of other Christians. When Christians are able to live in the joy that is theirs through Christ it is inspiring. We love to hear about the faithfulness and joy of others and to cheer them on as they fight the good fight. Watching others be joyful can be very encouraging but, it is one thing to watch others be joyful, but it is something else entirely to be joyful yourself. We all want to be joyful but being joyful is a challenge. It’s no coincidence that Christ tells His followers that following Him looks like taking up a cross. Joy can be hard, but we have been given something that we can always be joyful about. Christ has given us Himself. We have received the greatest gift ever and when we remember the difference that the gift of Christ makes for us in our lives it should make us joyful. Christ gave according to His means and even beyond His means by giving up even His life on the cross all so that now we can live in joy and faithfulness which in turn leads us to give of ourselves too. Christ is the greatest gift, and He is a gift that is meant to be shared, so share the gift and do it in a variety of ways. Give the Word to others and give other things as you are able because of the joy that is yours through Christ.

Prayer: Father thank you for the gift that is Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ. Be with us in this life and help us to be joyful and to share the gifts that we have been given with those that You have placed around us. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson

Saturday, July 6, 2024

Read [2 Cor 11:1-15](#)

“Scandals”

I did an internet search on the words “church scandal”. What did that discover? 281,000 results, ranging from Jimmy Swaggart’s sexual infidelities, Vatican cover-ups, a video on “Satan’s top 10 “Christian” female ministers,” to the failings of Mother Theresa. Sexual sins, financial misdeeds, hypocrisy, “God-sized” egos – there is no limit to the ways in which church leaders have failed. The invention of television was a huge opportunity to spread the Gospel, but many preachers fell in love with seeing themselves on TV. And today, with the internet, social media, and streaming video, you’d think it a miracle there are any churches left standing.

Paul faced this scene in the church at Corinth, almost 2,000 years ago. He describes the so-called “super-apostles” that had made their way into that church, teaching about Paul’s inadequacies and some kind of “different” gospel. Apparently, they were attempting to “correct” Paul’s misleading teachings about Jesus. “He hadn’t told them the full truth” – but fortunately, they were there to straighten them out. Already at that time, a preacher’s “stage presence” was critical. It turns out, Paul was too short! He wasn’t as slick a preacher as they were, and Paul talked way too much about the cross!

Paul took this seemingly silly attack as a serious threat. No, not a threat to him and his pride – a threat to the saving faith of his brothers and sisters in Christ. He points out that, just as the “serpent deceived Eve by his cunning,” his fear is that they “will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” Paul boasts of Christ’s power by inspiring him to sacrifice everything to bring them God’s strong Word. He’s come within inches of death on multiple occasions and will continue to do so because he wants to help them stay true to the faith. These “super apostles”? “Such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.”

The world today, just like in Paul’s day, rejoices at the scandals of Christian leaders. Division in the church, hypocrisy, and teachings that make you uncomfortable are music to their ears. If Christ’s messengers can be ridiculed, what they teach cannot be important. If a Christian can’t follow Christ’s teachings, then what’s the point?

Well, 2,000 years later, God’s Word is still being preached in truth and purity. God’s Spirit is still touching people’s hearts, and Jesus’ blood is still making sinners righteous. Yes, our churches are full of sinners – where else could we go, but to the Lord?

We pray: Gracious Lord, as the devil continues to lie, twist, and deceive; You quietly go about saving us, taught by sinful men and women by the power of Your Word. Protect Your Church through Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, July 8, 2024

Read 2 Corinthians 11:16-33

Rescued

Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, dangers from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers. 2 Corinthians 11:25b-26

When St. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, he could clearly remember his shipwreck and the time he was adrift at sea.

Millvina Dean had no such recollections. Millvina, the last surviving passenger from the Titanic, never was able to recall the crash, the panic, being put into a canvas mail sack, being lowered from the sinking ocean liner, and being placed in a lifeboat.

We probably shouldn't be surprised at Millvina's inability to remember what happened that terrible night more than 96 years ago. You see, Millvina -- the youngest passenger aboard that great ship -- was only nine weeks old at the time of the disaster. Plus, she wasn't told about her place on the ship for 9 more years afterwards.

There are obvious differences between the shipwrecks of St. Paul and Millvina Dean.

But, there is a key similarity: both were saved entirely by the action of someone else. Millvina was saved by unseen hands that lowered her to safety. Paul, along with the rest of us, are rescued by the nail-pierced hands of the crucified and risen Savior.

Because Jesus did what He did, because He was selfless enough and completely committed to the cause of saving us, we have been forgiven in this world and been promised a safe haven with Him above. And, just as Millvina continued to be thankful for those unknown hands, which had rescued her, so it is only right we continue to praise Jesus for our salvation, which took His life.

Prayer: Dear Savior, because You died for me, I am saved. Because You endured the pain of the cross, I am rescued from eternal death and damnation. May I always remember the sacrifice You made upon Calvary's cross. In Your Name, I give thanks. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Adapted from a LHM Devotion – June 2009

Tuesday, July 9, 2024

Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Pride

Pride governs a life that it overtakes. In pride, I look at myself, admire what I see, and let that admiration be the price of my life. Looking at myself, I fail to see others, especially I fail to see God. Overconfident, carelessly ignoring false details, I rush to judgment on others, and to decisions based on my desires. Heedlessly I rush into my destruction.

When pride begins to run my life, God helps me. He causes my efforts, my life, to fall apart. I am not in control, I'm not even knowledgeable enough to evaluate what I am doing, and when God knows I need a wake-up call, then things go astray.

The rain spoiling a "perfect" day, may be a realization time to see that God arranges things, not my planning. My personal injury, sometimes minor, sometimes major, provides time to repent of my pride, of my confidence in myself, resulting in my putting it where it belongs - in my Savior, Friend, Jesus Christ.

Sometimes, the problem isn't pride in itself. Sometimes the problem lies in my unwillingness to let God run my life. When "disaster" happens to me (whatever I call a disaster), then I may run to God complaining about what He "did" to me. How easy I find it is to complain. But when time causes me to look at those events clearer, then I see how my complaint comes from a rejection of God. No, no. I repent my LORD. Don't let me do it again.

Prayer: Thank you for bringing damage to my plans and desires LORD. Thank you of helping me to put You first. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, July 10, 2024

Read 2 Corinthians 12:11-21

God Humbles

“I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.”

2 Corinthians 12:21

Paul fears that God will humble him at Corinth. The issue for many in Corinth is the “unrepentance” of sexual immorality, impurity, and sensuality. Sexual immorality, impurity, and sensuality are evil, lawlessness, sin, and a MAJOR issue today. Look at the headlines last month that celebrated LGBT PRIDE and the wickedness of sexual immorality. We should pray for their repentance. That is not to say we don’t struggle with our own pride and sinfulness. Christ calls us to repent of all our sinful thoughts and deeds. This evil causes all Christians also to mourn over those who are not repentant of all their sins, namely, sexually immoral sins. God’s Word is True and Eternal. Jesus says what a thing is (see Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:21). We follow Christ and call a thing what it is; sin is sin, and this should cause us to grieve and repent of our own sins and to mourn over unrepentant hearts—love for God and for our neighbor whom God desires to repentant be saved from their sins.

- Paul used ἀκαθαρσία-*akatharsia*, **impure** as the ESV translated, which can be described as *a state of moral corruption and immoral vileness that literally means filth/dirty refuse and contents of graves; not clean/ impurity, and causing ceremonially uncleanness.*
- The next word πορνεία-*pōrnēia*, **sexual immorality**, Paul used can mean *unlawful sexual intercourse, adultery, incest, prostitution/harlotry, unchastity, fornication, and idolatry.*
- Then Paul used ἀσελγεία-*asēlgēia*, **sensuality**, which can mean *licentiousness, filthy, lasciviousness, wantonness, lewdness, debauchery, excess, a lack of self-constraint involving conduct that violates all bounds of what is socially acceptable, and self-abandonment—submitting to reprobate/wretched/unprincipled desires, interests or impulses.*

Dr. Seifrid comments, “Paul fears that again God will humble him toward the Corinthians when he comes to them. In so speaking, he obviously refers to his second, difficult visit to Corinth. As we have observed, while it is unlikely that the figure with whom Paul had a confrontation in Corinth was the immoral man of 1 Cor 5:1–13, it is entirely probable that this confrontation had to do with instances of immorality that the Corinthians happily tolerated, and even celebrated. Paul here speaks of “many” who previously sinned and who had not repented. The egregious instance of immorality that Paul addresses in 1 Cor 5 was only one case among many: “a little leaven, leavens the entire lump of dough” (1 Cor 5:6). The Corinthians’ tolerance of this flagrant transgression only encouraged other less shocking, but no less serious, evils.”

Prayer – Lord Jesus, grant true repentance and faith in our hearts from all sexual immoral, impure, and sensual thoughts and deeds, and keep us from all evil. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Nathan Tritch

Thursday, July 11, 2024
Read 2 Corinthians 13:1-4

Weakness AND Strength

“He was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.” 1 Corinthians 13:1-4

Are you confused yet? Is Christ weak or strong? The Scriptures describe Him as going silently as a lamb to the slaughter. He is often described as meek and mild. According to Paul in Philippians 2, Christ empties himself, becoming nothing, taking the nature of a servant. Silent. Meek. Mild. Servant. Nothing. This all sounds pretty weak.

But the Scriptures also describe Jesus as a warrior who is victorious over sin, death, and Satan. He is described as ruling over the nations with a rod of iron (see Psalm 2 and Revelation 12). He is the lion of Judah. Warrior. Victorious. Ruling with a rod of iron. A lion. This all sounds pretty strong.

Likewise, Paul describes himself as weak and strong. In fact, he has just finished boasting in his weakness, and now he is talking about coming to town and he “will not spare (the unrepentant ones).”

Is Christ weak or strong? Are his servants (are we) weak or strong?

It depends.

All of the descriptions are true for Jesus and for Paul (and Paul’s descriptions are true for us). We share in the weakness and strength of Christ. We share in the weakness of the cross that means losing our lives for our salvation and for the benefit of our neighbors. We share in the strength and reign of the Risen Christ, to confront sin and announce that Jesus is King.

The difference comes in which is needed. Someone who is comfortable and happy with their sin needs to hear the powerful Word that calls us to repent, turn, and trust in Christ (not in our wisdom or holiness). But someone who is hurting, who sees their need, we approach with the gentle word of forgiveness and love from the Good Shepherd – Who is both strong and weak to provide all that we need.

Prayer: Lord, keep us in your truth and move our hearts to repentant faith. As we speak Your Word, give us wisdom to know when to speak in strength or weakness according to the need of our neighbor. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Friday, July 12, 2024

Read 2 Corinthians 13:5-10

Self-Examination

“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? —unless indeed you fail to meet the test!
(2 Corinthians 13:5 ESV).

I am in a summer class right now at the seminary which means that from time to time I have to take tests. I don't really mind taking tests but some of my classmates hate it. I'm sure that most of us remember having to take tests in school and probably dreading it. When Paul told the Corinthians to test themselves that may have sounded like a scary thing to some and to others it may have seemed like not that big of a deal. Paul's challenge may not sound like that big of a deal to us either, but we should take it seriously.

How often do we really take a minute and reflect on ourselves in the way that Paul speaks about? We are great at navel gazing and thinking about ourselves, but honest self-reflection is probably less common. I know that in my own life I hardly ever take time to examine myself beyond individual actions or mistakes. Self-examination will always leave us disappointed because in one way or another we will always fail to pass the perfect requirements that the Law sets before us. We simply can't do it on our own but luckily for us we have a great classmate who takes the test for us and got a perfect score. Christ became a man and took our place in the Law's classroom and took the test in our name. Not only has Christ passed the test for us but He even continues to teach us, we get the passing score, and we get to learn the material anyway as we are sanctified in the faith to be more like Christ every day. Self-examination can be hard but as Christians, self-examination is dependent on Christ who defines who we are. We have hope because of the work that Christ has done for us.

Prayer: Father, help us to grow in faith in the work of Christ for our sake and to trust that He has passed the test. Be with us as we go about our lives and help us to glorify You. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Zach Johnson

Saturday, July 13, 2024

Read [2 Cor 13:11-14](#)

“Final Greetings”

Paul has written a long letter to the Corinthian Christians; today we reach its end. It's very short – just four verses filled with short sentences. You could read this in a few seconds and miss its message completely.

“Finally,” Paul begins. This word divides what follows from the many serious, Law-oriented thoughts that filled much of the rest of the letter. Paul had held the Corinthians to account. He'd pointed out their sins, their rebellions against God, and their taking up some of their old, sinful ways. But now, that's done. What follows is some guidance and all Gospel.

“Finally, brothers, rejoice.” The Law is good and necessary to turn us in repentance to God. But the Gospel – the Good News that Jesus has died for your sins, rose from the dead, and has made you His brothers and sisters – sons and daughters of God the Father – is what leads our new lives in Christ. “Rejoice!” Joy is what fills our hearts and minds when we remember God's love for us through His Son.

Next, some advice for sanctified living: “Aim for restoration.” When you think about what God has done for you in reconciling you to Him, the petty disagreements and “issues” that divide us from one another should appear ridiculous to our eyes! After Jesus died for me, how can I stay angry at my brother or sister in Christ?!

“Comfort one another.” None of us can rejoice all the time. We all have disasters, diagnoses, and death that the devil tries to use to take our breath away. But, remembering the Spirit that gave us our breath, we share Christ's love and comfort with those hurting. We share with those in need, as Jesus fed the hungry, healed the sick, and loved those in despair.

“Agree with one another.” What?! Remember that Jesus is your Brother and God is your Father, and talk it out, explain your position, and treat the one you can't agree with as your brother or sister.

“Live in peace.” If God – Who created you, sustains you, and Who is offended by every sin – can be reconciled with us and consider us righteous sons and daughters and now invites us to His eternal feast, then we truly know, understand, and have peace. All petty human conflict fades when you have peace with God, and this peace changes us to see the world differently.

“Greet one another with a holy kiss.” That was a common practice among Christians in Paul's day, but maybe not so much in today's “sensitive” climate. The idea is, though, to shine the Love of Christ to your brothers and sisters when you see them. The simple meeting of two believers is precious; savor the moment.

We pray with Paul and all believers: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson