

Second Sunday of Easter - 2018

St Nicholas 0800

Year B, 8th April, 2018

1 - 1 Corinthians 1:1-17

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Psalm 119:41-48

Mark 3:19b-27

V. The Lord is Risen - Alleluia!

R. He is risen indeed - Alleluia!

1 Corinthians 1:2 "To the Church of God.., to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy."

1. The Church at Corinth

a) Corinth, in Paul's day, a largely Roman, therefore Gentile city, in the northern Peloponnese of Greece - messy - sailors, trading, you name it. The ruins of ancient Corinth are close to the well known Corinthian Canal.

Corinth, a melting pot, was reflected in the character of the church, a community bombarded, by the whole gamut of the Mediterranean immorality, pagan, religious and Greek philosophical teachings. There were quarreling divisions - little discipline, anti-authority - doing their own thing misunderstanding freedom as license. They loved the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit, but the

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love of Christ, rooted in truth - a different matter, more difficult.
Does it sound familiar? Sadly yes!

b) Paul, as an Apostle, is clear - "called by the will of God"¹ with the authority of an apostle, sent by the Risen Lord,² comes to affirm a church, "sanctified in Christ Jesus, and called to be saints, together..." with whom? - "all those in every place"³ - an international church.

Mess, yes, but sanctified in Christ Jesus. Note:

- they were "called" as Paul was called". to be disciples. Paul uses this language often: "God is faithful... you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus....".⁴ "we preach Christ crucified... to those who are called..."⁵ "consider your calling...not many of you were wise... not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth."⁶ This is foundational, reassuring stuff for all of us to hear, to accept as Gospel truth. Vocational!

¹ 1 Corinthians 1:1 (ESV)

² cf John 20:21

³ 1 Corinthians 1:2 (ESV)

⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:9 (ESV)

⁵ 1 Corinthians 1:23,24 (ESV)

⁶ 1 Corinthians 1:26

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- "called to be saints". Called, sanctified, set apart from the ways of the world. Not "holier than thou" sanctimonious - displaying such superiority is anathema, hateful, abhorrent, odious. Rather this is "commitment" language - trust and obey. "take up your cross and follow me" language, despite the mess.
 - Such talk speaks of "immature Christians needing to grow into maturity εν Χριστω."
 - How? Through "the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus..."⁷ "Grace" a tricky word, often wrongly used to replace the role of the Holy Spirit, is God's unearned favour towards us, His children - He gives what we do not deserve. He gathers us into His orbit of love, His initiating generosity, given unconditionally. We are set free through the work of Jesus - Cross, Resurrection - the grace of God is His generous, overwhelming love toward us. It is, has to be, **amazing** Grace!
- b) "Maturity", for them, for us, is more than growing in knowledge, understanding. It is also growing into the likeness of Christ, in character, in how we operate, relate to others - for "you

⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:4b (ESV)

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are not lacking in any gift”⁸ as the people of God. It is possible, people!

Paul’s focus is on “Jesus” - eight times in nine verses - Jesus, the risen Christ, the very heart of the Gospel. is what Paul proclaims within this mess. **It is Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit, who cleans up the mess.** Without Jesus life is a mess, it cannot be otherwise. “God is faithful...”⁹

2. The Actual Mess

a) When a church “mess” hits the fan, in this case division, there is instant condemnation all round, and some leave. Accept the fact that the Church is messy, as Paul does. You and I are part of this mess. Recall the new hospital, years ago in "Yes Minister" - it was perfect in every way, running well - it had no patients!

Paul, however, sees the Corinthian Church as they are in Christ. His is a statement of hope of what we all can become, as we grow - “I give thanks to my God always for you...”¹⁰

Paul is looking at the church’s potential: “ in every way you were enriched in him ...”¹¹ We can become the people God intended us to be. We can be healed, not just physically, but in all

⁸ 1 Corinthians 1:6 (ESV)

⁹ 1 Corinthians 1:9 (ESV)

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 1:4a (ESV)

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 1:5a (ESV)

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those hurts, resentments, squabbles and differences. The dross, corruption, sinfulness of the world's rationalisations can be cleared out, erased from our computer banks. We can become a new creation, enriched "in all speech and all knowledge."¹² which is an introduction to the spiritual gifts of later chapters, but for now "trust" - "when they bring you to trial...do not be anxious... what you are to say, but say whatever is given you....for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit."¹³

Paul gives some basics:

- God enriches us, fertilizes us, to grow.
- God gives us all we need to do be disciples, to live *πν Χριστω*,
- God keeps us strong to the end.

b) But for now the niceties are over. Paul moves **from what we potentially are in Christ to what we really are**: "I appeal to you, brothers (and sisters), ...that... you agree... that there be no divisions among you... that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment."¹⁴ "there is quarrelling among you."¹⁵ This is

¹² 1 Corinthians 1:5b (ESV)

¹³ Mark 13:11 (ESV)

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:10 (ESV)

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 1:11 (ESV)

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serious, change your minds, repent, not division, factionalism, but one in Christ! Respect, agree, don't lose the plot!

Lack of unity in the church cannot be allowed to be dismissed lightly. Maturity in Christ, accepting one another as brothers and sisters is "loving your neighbour as yourself" is to normal.

Secondly to belong to the community of the Church is essential. To be a solitary Christian is an aberration unless you're a desert hermit, or in solitary confinement.

Two extreme views reflect this:

- **The exclusive.** You set up criteria that is so stringent, that if the other doesn't accept it, are therefore not correct, they are out - applies to doctrine, church practices, tradition etc.
or
- **The inclusive.** the liberal - the criteria are so sloppy that anything goes. Just claim to be a Christian! Where do we sit?
- Both tendencies are with us today. Two things first so we do not miss the point.
- Personalities played a part - Paul, Apollos, and Cephas (Peter). None would have encouraged there being parties.
- Secondly it is very difficult to hold everything, all teaching and practice, in balance. We have to be selective. eg this sermon will not, cannot, contain all aspects of our reading.

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The problem comes when the "select bits" become the whole. "When a Christian, or (church is), totally absorbed with one aspect of the truth to the neglect, exclusion, or even denial of the whole truth as it is in Jesus, then the danger-point has been reached".¹⁶

. Never take your eyes off Jesus as Lord, do not allow a personality, or a truth, to dominate! There is always more!

b) **"I follow Paul."**¹⁷ Paul the founder of the Church at Corinth¹⁸ had followers from the beginning. Therefore Paul was seen as the man, the guru, no one could match, tinged with a touch of nostalgia!

There is something of this in many congregations. "Remember when...." This is not a difference in theology or Biblical understanding necessarily, but a dulling of our passion for love of the Father, the reconciling work of Jesus, and the activity of the Holy Spirit.

-c) **"I follow Apollos."**¹⁹ Acts tells us he came from Alexandria - bright, intelligent, excellent communicator, very capable in expounding the OT, an apologist, but "he knew only the baptism of

¹⁶ Prior D. *The Message of 1 Corinthians* IVF, p29

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:12

¹⁸ cf Acts 18:1-18

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 1:12, cf Acts 18:24-19:7
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John.²⁰ Priscilla and Aquila "explained to him the way of God more adequately." Apollos could possibly have unintentionally introduced, into Corinth a common form of snobbishness - to be sucked into the orbit of a highly personable, wonderful teacher and preacher. There are dangers

- following the speaker around - Pied Piper and
 - to swallow all that is said as being correct, and excluding any other. If so "schism is not far off."²¹
- d) **"I follow Cephas,"**²² or Peter. Possibly Jewish converts who could cause tension with the Gentile Christians, as in other places. Did Peter visit Corinth? We do not know. This "Peter Party" possibly represented Jewish Christianity, therefore more emphasis on the Law.. "Legalism" is a huge danger to the Church - a tradition an interpretation, a practice can tie us up in knots, even though we have forgotten the reason for it (baking pan, cutting the ends of the roast).

So often the first flush of the Holy Spirit can easily give way to a negative, restrictive legalism. The love of God, compassion of Jesus, and the warmth of the Spirit, is quenched.

²⁰ Acts 18:19,26

²¹ Prior, *ibid.*, p 32.

²² 1 Corinthians 1:12

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e) **"I follow Christ."**²³ On the surface this sounds, OK, but probably Paul was aiming at those who claimed they had a direct line to the Lord. They became their own authority, above contradiction!. If so, then it is very relevant for today. It is all around us - having my own interpretation of God - closed mind!

You hear it. "We are sick of divisions. Let's go straight to the Lord. Who needs leaders?" Certainly God can and does speak to us, but never to cause division! Secondly such thinking can bring us into first and second-class Christians - superior and inferior - it brings schism and, given time, fades away. It has ever been so. Recall the Lord's words to the Church in Ephesus: "I have this against you...you have abandoned the love that you had at first."²⁴

3. Conclusion

a) Paul preached unity - only Jesus can do that in His love and reconciling work. His appeal is to "agree with one another", "no divisions among you", "(be) united in the same mind and the same judgement."²⁵

b) Hel argues three things against disunity:

²³ 1 Corinthians 1:12

²⁴ Revelation 2:4 (ESV)

²⁵ 1 Corinthians 1:10 (ESV)

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- We, on our own, are the divided, disintegrated people. In Jesus we come together, unity, made whole - individually and as His Church.
- "Was Paul crucified for you?" "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."²⁶ That is the key. Unless the crucified, Risen Lord. is central, unless we seek first His Kingdom we have missed the Gospel.
- "were you baptized in the name of Paul?"²⁷ No! "We were buried... with (Christ) by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead...we too might walk in newness of life."²⁸ That is what Baptism is about - a sign of humility - dying to self, being raised to life - that is resurrection!
- Is Jesus your Lord or something else? There are plenty of idols around! "Where does your passion lie?". Recall the Catechism: "WhereIn my baptism I was made a member of Christ, the child of God and an inheritor of the Kingdom of heaven." That is who we are. Alleluia!

c) To sum up:

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 2:2 (ESV)

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:14b (ESV)

²⁸ Romans 6:4 (ESV)

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- Seek first His Kingdom.
- for as long as the world sees Christians as divided, without respect, doing our own thing, isolated from community, the work-place, they have every reason **not** to believe in Jesus!
- Therefore love, accept and respect one another in Christ despite differences.
- Allow God to act: He “breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”²⁹

We pray: Father God, soften us, shape us into the likeness of your son Jesus, allow the Holy Spirit to be the Potter working the clay

to more truly reflect the beauty, the joy and the all-embracing αγάπη-love of Jesus, within our lives. What a marvellous God you are, in Jesus' name. Amen. Alleluia!

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord

And we pray that our unity will one day be restored

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love

Yeah they'll know we are Christians by our love.

²⁹ John 20:22b (ESV)