

Devotions for the Week of August 4, 2019
YOU GOT MAIL: A Journey Through Paul's Letters
Connected - A Letter to the Church in Corinth
North East United Methodist Church
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This week we only have time to read and discuss one of Paul's letters to the Corinthians.

Take time this week to read I Corinthians in its entirety as it would have been read when received in Corinth in 55 AD.

Sunday, August 4, 2019

Read I Corinthians 1:10-13.

Paul wrote his letter to the church in Corinth during his third missionary journey (Acts 19:1-20:1) about 55 AD. Paul had spent eighteen months in Corinth during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-18). While staying in Ephesus, a delegation visited Paul to talk about problems in the Corinthian church and Paul responded to these problems in his letters.

One of the first issues Paul addresses in the Corinthian church is that of division and disunity. Factions were rising up, each group following a leader in the church that thought the way they did. They were letting their opposing viewpoints separate them and hurt the church rather than work together, all looking to the Head, Jesus Christ. It must grieve God that Christians still do this today. Jesus' prayer was "*that they may all be*

one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us” (John 17:21).

It wasn't important to Paul that people agree on every issue, but that they agree on what truly matters, Jesus Christ. Paul mentions Jesus 10 times in the first 10 verses; there is no one else we should follow, no one else who should guide our decisions and actions.

I remember in my first church, Asbury UMC in Salisbury, a woman talking about another woman in the church. She said, *“but she is not a true Asburian.”* I thought to myself, *“I don't want to be an Asburian.”* It is not the church that defines me. I want to be a Christian. Christ defines us.

As Paul asks the Corinthians, *“Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”* Jesus is the one who was crucified, who bled and died for us, who rose and defeated death for us, who sent His Holy Spirit for us. Jesus is the one who walks and talks and guides and nurtures us on this life journey.

Paul challenges the Corinthians to *“speak the same thing,”* to allow for *“no divisions,”* and to *“be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”* Paul challenges them to give up control, to focus on Christ and His Word, and to recognize, when one does disagree with a brother or sister there is something that must overshadow that disagreement—love (I Corinthians 13). Only then will outsiders be drawn to Christ...only then will God be glorified.

Do your actions and words create unity in the “*body of Christ*”? Are you part of the solution or part of the problem when it comes to division in the church? Are you focused on Christ, taking every issue to prayer and the reading of His Word or are you following another, letting other voices guide and direct your actions? Take time in prayer, asking God to show you how you might honor and focus on Him?

Monday, August 5, 2019

Read I Corinthians 1:18-31.

Paul writes, “*Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has NOT God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*” He goes on to write, “*But God has chosen...the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.*”

Every day I am reminded of the truth in this passage. I awake in the morning very aware that I am unworthy to serve God, to speak to God, to preach His Word. Every day I make mistakes, whether it be a movie I watch, or my pride surfacing, or hatred rising up in my heart for an enemy, or ignoring my wife and children for selfish pursuits. The list could go on and on and on. “*For no one is righteous, not one.*”

Every day I am reminded of my sinful nature and that is why every day I am so thankful for God’s grace and my Savior Jesus Christ, because without Him, I would be

lost. And to think that God chose me...a sinner...to preach His Word, to share Christ with others...at times is overwhelming. I am humbled. And I realize, as I say to many people who say to me while exiting the church on Sunday, "*Great message, preacher*"...I respond "*God is good...It's All Him.*"

God has taken ordinary people like you and I...foolish in our actions and pursuits...sinful creatures...everyday people with everyday jobs and gifts...and God uses us to bring truth to the world, to replace the "*wisdom of this world*" with Christ.

Why us? Why someone like me? Like you? Paul says, "*that no flesh should glory in His presence.*" So no one can boast of his or her achievements, his or her ministry and accomplishments...Salvation is totally from God through Jesus Christ. All that matters is from God through Jesus Christ. All that is wise is from God through Jesus Christ.

Sit with God in awe that God would choose someone like you to share His message, to love His children, and to help His Church witness to a hurting world. Confess your shortcomings. Accept His forgiveness. Give God the Glory!

Tuesday, August 6, 2019

Read I Corinthians 3:1-15.

Paul addresses in these verses the difference between carnal and spiritual Christians. Note that whether carnal or spiritual, both are described as

believers, having put their faith in God, in Jesus Christ and His death on a cross, but they are very different in their actions, their behavior, and their speech. Both will have their works “*revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is.*” If one’s work endures, the spiritual Christian, he will receive a reward. If one’s work burns, the carnal Christian, he will suffer loss; “*but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*” Paul tells the Corinthians that the foundation is Jesus Christ and each one must “*take heed how he builds on*” that foundation.

The example Paul gives of the carnal Christian is one who builds on the foundation of Christ “*envy, strife, and divisions.*” He asks, “*are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?*” Carnal Christians are controlled by their own desires, whereas Spiritual Christians, or as Paul would say, Mature Christians, are controlled by God’s desires, His Word.

The question we are all called to ask is, “*Which one are we?*” It is a question we must ask every day and in every situation because as human beings, living in a “*fallen*” world, we fluctuate between the two.

Allow God to help you ask the difficult questions. In this situation, dealing with this issue, in this relationship, “*Which one am I?*” How much influence do your desires have on your life? Is your goal each day to make God’s desires yours? How are you building on the church’s one foundation, Jesus Christ, with your actions and your words?

Wednesday, August 7, 2019

Read I Corinthians 4:1-7.

In these verses, Paul explains that if everything we have is from God, we can not judge one another, causing division, *“For ‘who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?’”* (I Corinthians 2:16). Paul writes, *“none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”* (vs. 7). In other words, none of us can be *“puffed up”* or arrogant, judging ourselves as better or more spiritual than another because everything we have we *“received”* as a gift from God; we did not earn it with our own work, skills, and actions.

Our faith, our salvation, our gifts, were given us by God; thus, we cannot *“boast”* as if it is us. Therefore, how can we judge another if all we have that is good is from God. Paul says, *“Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God.”*

Ask God to show you where you are being judgmental of another. Seek His forgiveness. Spend time in prayer.

Thursday, August 8, 2019

Read I Corinthians 8:9-13 & 9:19-23.

The goals of Paul's life were to glorify God and bring people to Christ. Thus, Paul writes to the Corinthians telling them to do nothing that might bring another person down or drive them away from the faith. Some of these actions that may drive another away are not necessarily wrong for we have "*freedom in Christ.*" For example, cutting grass on a Sunday, drinking a beer, or owning a very expensive car are not sins, but, especially to outsiders of the Christian faith, who know little and have grown up with certain expectations of what a Christian should be, these actions can be seen as hypocritical and may "*become a stumbling block to those who are weak*" (I Corinthians 8:9). In the church, when one sins "*against the brethren,*" causes division and disunity, fails to forgive, or gossips about another, young Christians in the faith, witnessing such actions and speech, may fall away from the faith, and away from God.

Paul writes, "*I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake...*" (9:22). Thus, even if we might not believe there is anything wrong with our actions or that our behavior is justified, if it affects our witness in the community and discourages new believers in the church, if it "*makes my brother stumble,*" we should not do it. Instead, we become "*a servant to all, that [we] might win more*" (9:19). We remember "*It's not about us.*"

One example of this I've experienced in the churches I've served in the past revolves around church dinners. There have been times that new people, new Christians, come to help out, to serve, and are told there is nothing for them to do. I try to help my volunteers understand that if you can't find anything for a new person to do, give them your job. Many times, if they are told there is nothing for them to do, we don't see them again. We have been "*a stumbling block*" in their faith journey. Another example I have come across over the years is gossip in the community. Gossip is "*a stumbling block*" to outsiders. Who would want to join a church where the people gossip and talk about each other behind backs and criticize the very church they want their neighbors to attend?

Pray and ask God to show you how you might be "*a stumbling block*" to others. How might you become "*a servant to all*" that you "*might win more*" to Christ?

Friday, August 9, 2019

Read I Corinthians 10:15-17.

"*One Bread, One Body.*" Paul reiterates in these two verses that Christ cannot be divided. He says, "*For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread,*" Jesus Christ, the author of our salvation.

We sing, "*we, though many throughout the earth, we are one body in this one Lord. Gentile or Jew, servant or free, woman or man, no more...Many the gift, many the*

works, one in the Lord of all...” We are all different, with different views and beliefs, but the one thing that holds us together is that Jesus’ body was broken and His blood spilt for us and regardless of who we are, Christ, and only Christ, is our salvation. Christ is the uniting factor.

Years ago I discovered a way to deal with those in my ministry who disagreed with me and criticized me, who believed differently. I began to try to see them as God sees them, His children. So I began to think of what they may have looked like as a child before the world enveloped them and their innocence was lost and one’s many opinions were formed. I try to picture them like I see my children for that is how God sees them. I then find it easier to pray for them, that God would bless them and touch their hearts. In my own strength I could not do this. I would want to retaliate. But looking to Jesus changes the way we act, the way we think, and helps us remember what is truly important to God.

Saturday, August 10, 2019

Read I Corinthians, Chapter 12.

In chapter 12, Paul talks about unity within diversity. He explains that there are “*many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you.’*” We need each other for God has given each person certain gifts and all those gifts are needed and are given by the “*same Spirit*” for building up the ministries of the Lord.

God has blessed me with the gift of writing, preaching, and teaching. God has given me vision, the ability to see what is ahead and not simply focus on the present. God has given me passion for His work and a calling to reach the lost and care for the hurting all over the world. In the past I have struggled with pastoral care, with the gift of “helps.” At times I lack empathy. Over the years, many people have helped me, going on visits with me, visiting when I could not, caring for and praying for the sick and hurting. I no longer feel youth ministry is my gift so I thank God for people like Josh and others who fill in this gap, who have a passion and gift for relating to our young people. Our church treasurer and Finance Team monitor the money, another area that is not my gift or passion. We need everyone to use their gifts for the good of the church, to witness and reach out to the hurting and lost, to share Jesus Christ.

Pray that God would show you where your gifts lie and help you to use them for His glory.

Saturday, August 10, 2019 - EXTRA CREDIT

Read I Corinthians, Chapter 13.

Paul makes it clear that the greatest gift...a gift given to all of us...is love. Read over Paul’s description of love.

Are you patient? Kind? Not boastful? Not seeking your own? Not rude? What areas might you work on to make your love more Christ-like? Whom are you called to love today? Ask God to give you a heart like His.

Don’t forget to invite someone to church tomorrow!