

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Second Sunday After Epiphany, January 17, 2021

✠ ✠ ✠

(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 27, 387:1, 535:1-5, 44, 373:7.

Lessons: Isaiah 42:5-10, Acts 9:1-30, Matthew 10:16-18.

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Paul is writing the two letters called ‘Corinthians’ *“to the church”* – to believers, to those made holy by the work of Jesus Christ, to those who believe the Gospel. These are people whom God had gathered together in Corinth who through the Gospel have been brought to faith in Jesus Christ. They – and we – are those whom the Holy Ghost has sanctified, that is, set apart from the unbelieving world and brought into a new fellowship with Jesus. Today please listen as

PAUL THANKS GOD FOR HIS GRACE GIVEN TO THE CORINTHIAN CHRISTIANS

- 1. He writes to Christians as an apostle, called by the Lord.**
- 2. He thanks God for their – and our – abundant gifts.**

We learn from the book of Acts that Paul spent about one and one-half years in Corinth as a missionary and a pastor. There were problems in the congregation in Corinth. Yet Paul reminds them that *“you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.”*

However, love was often absent. As evidence of that we must look to the famous ‘love chapter’ 13 of First Corinthians. We need to remember that this is not simply romantic love. It is true love, true caring such as we find in John 3:16: *“For God so loved the world.”* Chapter 13 begins: *“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.”* 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 (NIV) After that admonition, he speaks of what true love is and does. *“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”* (1 Corinthians 13:4-7) That kind of love was not always present when Christians were and are gathered together even today.

Paul identifies himself as *“Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.”* Because of his personal history he wrote about himself as *“the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”* 1 Corinthians 15:9

But he is an apostle by the will of God, not by his own choosing, but by God’s choosing. He was “sent out” directly by Jesus Christ to do the work of God. Paul had not walked and talked with Jesus during the three years of Jesus’ ministry on earth, but the risen Jesus had appeared to him and spoken to him on the road to Damascus. Jesus had told him *“I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”* (Acts 26:17-18) Jesus Christ had called him to that work just as he had called Paul to a new life from the unbelief in which he had been living.

Paul – previously known as Saul – was a horrible man from the perspective of Christians. Among the Jews he was a good man and one whom the Jews ignorantly believed was upholding their religion, but this was really just his unbelief in Jesus Christ, the only Redeemer whom God had sent to mankind to rescue them from their sins, so that everyone who believes in him shall be saved.

How terrible was Paul? He was at the horrible execution of Stephen when Stephen was stoned to death. ***“Saul was there, giving approval to his death.”*** (Acts 8:1)

But on his way to Damascus, God called him away from his previous way of life in a most spectacular way. He was sent to the Gentiles.

An apostle is one “sent out”. Jesus’ apostles were not sent out like salesmen to sell products, but to give something away. It was God’s will that they do what they did in proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Savior of all mankind. Jesus came to earth not only to be the Savior for the Jews, but also for all Gentiles, even us gathered here today.

And what is it that they were to give away? What was the “product” they were apostles for? It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the knowledge that Jesus Christ died for the sins of the whole world.

With the Corinthian Christians, we can rejoice: ***“But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”*** 1 Cor. 6:11 (NIV) It is by the grace of God that you have been made clean and were declared ‘not guilty’ because of what Jesus Christ did for you! Paul, one of God’s saints, writes to you, too. Hear the Word of God, repent daily, and rejoice that you, too, are among ***“those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ--their Lord and ours: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”***

Before he turns to problems in the congregation, Paul thanks God for the abundant blessings the Corinthians have received. He is praising God for his mercy for the Corinthian Christians. In spite of their many weaknesses they were still believers. They had received the free gift of God’s grace, a gift made possible through the work of Christ suffering and dying in the place of every sinful human.

Do you realize what a tremendous treasure it is that a Christian has the Word of God, the Word of eternal grace and comfort? The Christian also has Baptism, the Sacrament of the Altar, the understanding of the Ten Commandments. In addition, the believer also has the certain assurance that God will hear us in trouble, if we will only call upon him.

And so it is that we, just like the Corinthian Christians, don’t lack any spiritual gift.

Let’s review these gifts. First is God’s grace in Christ Jesus. There is no greater blessing than grace, the pardoning love of God through his Son, who died for us. This is the heart and soul of the Gospel, the solid foundation of our Christian faith.

The blessings which Jesus had given to the Corinthian Christians included being enriched in all their speaking and all their knowledge. The Corinthian people – especially pagans – appeared to value eloquence and wisdom above anything else. They pursued wisdom as the highest goal in life and were proud of all the human knowledge they had acquired. Doesn’t this sound like the age in which we live? But the Christians in Corinth had, through the grace of Jesus Christ, gained a wisdom greater than anything they had ever known, and more important than any unbeliever could gain without God’s grace.

Because of this, they had a message to proclaim that was more important than the most eloquent speaker had ever delivered. What made them wise? Paul writes: ***“our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you.”*** It was what Paul had told them about Christ as God’s Son and the Savior of all mankind that strengthened them in their faith. A Christian has truth and fact from God, a certainty that no unbeliever can ever know, which affects everything he or she says.

As a result of such ***“confirmation”*** or strengthening the Corinthian believers possessed all the gifts God gives believers: things like wisdom, faith, love, devotion, patience, endurance. Even such extraordinary gifts as the working of miracles and speaking in tongues were found in their congregation.

God has also given them ‘all understanding’, that is, correct knowledge and understanding of the purpose of their entire physical life and being on earth. They had learned to know the way to eternal life, and they were filled with the riches of the certainty of the grace of God.

The Christians of Corinth did not lack any gift of grace which was needed for their growth. They had learned the truth of God's Word. Later, Paul speaks of their spiritual gifts in this way: ***“Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit. There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.”*** (1 Cor. 12:1-11)

The believers in Corinth had been given these rich gifts while they eagerly awaited the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ on Judgement Day. They used these gifts for the work for Christ, just as we should, ***“while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”*** (Titus 2:13). They were confident of the truth that ***“our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.”*** Philippians 3:20 (NIV)

In the same way the heart of every believer is anxious for the heavenly mansions Christ promised. For that reason, every believer wants to use all his gifts and abilities in the interest of his Lord. In the meantime he knows that Christ the Lord will strengthen us unto the end, the end of the world, because that is near, or to the end of our life, if the Lord calls us home before his day of judgment. But no matter when the day may come, God has declared us to be blameless, that we shall not be condemned. This blamelessness of the Christians is not because of any merits on their part, but in the fact that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to them by faith. This is a righteousness that does not come ***“from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”*** (Phil. 3:9) This comes from God alone.

And God is faithful. Our hope of eternal life is based upon the promise of God, who cannot lie. We have been elected and called to the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ by the boundless love of God from eternity. And so we have been united with him in the Holy Christian Church, the invisible gathering of all believers.

So the Christian's faith is not a vague and uncertain hope, but is based upon the fact that God is faithful. Luther wrote: ***“What Christ has begun in the believer, and what He has already given you, in that He will surely keep you to the end and into eternity, if only you do not willfully fall from it and cast it from you; for His Word and promise, given you, and His work, which He performs in you, is not changeable like men's word and work, but sure, certain, and divinely immovable truth. Since you have such a divine call, take comfort in it and rely upon it firmly.”***

Holy Scripture testifies that God, who has called us, is so faithful that, when he has begun the good work in us, he also will preserve it to the end, if we do not turn away from him, but firmly keep until the end the work begun in us.

Their Savior's promise that he will keep them in the faith unto the end is a special assurance. They were convinced that their Lord would return in glory to take them to himself in heaven, and they eagerly awaited his return. The Christian who lives his life with the prayer ***“Come, Lord Jesus,”*** in his heart is rich in all grace and knowledge and faith and spiritual gifts.

Paul assures the Corinthians that they can count on God to keep saving faith alive in their hearts, so that they will be with their Lord in eternity. God keeps his promises to his believers.

So we, too, today, can have that same confidence and joy. God has forgiven our sins. God will give us eternal life through faith in his Son. Let us never forget this but rejoice at what God has done for us! Amen.