

“We are God’s Servants, Working Together”

1 Corinthians 3: 1-9

This seems like an odd text to be reading for our church, our church that is in pretty good shape, our church that is pretty healthy, our church that is filled with people who actually like each other and enjoy worshipping together on a Sunday morning, people who like serving God together.

Why are we reading this text that was obviously written to and for a church that was experiencing division and strife, a church that is seemingly so opposite from ours? Why are we reading this text that talks about how jealousy and quarreling was tearing the church at Corinth apart when our church is in pretty good shape? Where is the good news for us in this passage? Why am I stirring up trouble for us by reading this text that doesn’t seem to fit our needs at all?

The answer and the Good news for us can be found in the last part of this text: For we are God’s servants, working together. That is the good news and that is the reminder of why we do the things we do as church. We are God’s servants, working together.

At the heart of it, that is the basic message of our church, Big C church, any church. This is the message that we as Christians should be living out in our

ministries always. We are all God's servants, working together. That's the point of it all.

And what a wonderful message for us to proclaim during this season of Epiphany, a time when we as the Church are called to take another look at our lives, our mission, our calling as people of faith now that God has been revealed to us through the birth of Jesus Christ.

And this text gives us the perfect opportunity to do just that. In our Scripture today, Paul has some very poignant words for this church in Corinth, words that call them to the carpet, words that call them to stop fighting, words that call them to be the Body of Christ here on earth. Paul knows that this church has lost their vision of the Kingdom of God. Instead of unity, they have discord. Instead of community, they have quarrels. Instead of sharing love and peace, they have discontent and back-biting. Instead of acting like God's servants, working together, they are acting like people who could care less about each other, let alone working toward caring for God's people. And like any good parent, he has to show them some tough love.

In this letter to the Corinthians, Paul responds to the news that he has received that the church in Corinth is fighting and their fighting is not over some grand theological point. Maybe that he could understand it if it was because at least they would be talking about things of faith or struggling with the unknowns about

God, trying to grow in faith. That type of spiritual tension he expected in a church or maybe could understand it because when it comes to faith, it is so personal.

Spiritual tension, struggling with faith, that he could understand but not this. Paul learns that their fighting, their jealousy, their quarreling is over which minister was the greatest to serve their church and whose spiritual gifts are the greatest and The argument has reached its boiling point.

Sound familiar right? Just like Jesus' disciples needed to know who was the best, this church in Corinth needs to know who is the best preacher, the best worker in the church, the person with the best spiritual gifts, the best person of faith.

And through this letter, Paul reminds them that that is not how it works. He tells them that it is human nature to want to know who is best, because that is the way this world works. And as people of faith, we are called to move beyond that mentality, immaturity as Paul calls it, and live as Christ calls us to live.

The world tells us to find out who will do the best job and hitch our wagons to that person and then we will experience all the rewards and benefits from that "best" relationship.

Paul reminds this community and us today that this is not how the Church works or how God works. And if the truth be told, this group of believers has already hitched their wagon to the best: God through Jesus Christ.

And the rewards and benefits are different from the rewards and benefits of this world. Paul reminds this group that the world sees that we have chosen the foolishness of the cross, that we have chosen to hitch our wagons to a guy who was crucified, to a guy who taught peace and love rather than power and might. And the world sees us as crazy or in modern terms: We are big losers, with a capital L on our foreheads.

But Paul says that we know the truth. We know how it really works. We know that that L on our forehead really stands for Loved. And we know that Jesus is our Lord and Savior, powerful and mighty who chose to come as a newborn baby, who chose to teach peace and love, who chose to give his life so that we might live.

Paul says in reality, we are the biggest winners of it all. But the group at Corinth can't see that because they are fighting and quarreling over who is the best, measuring the church, the preachers, their own spiritual gifts by this world's standards, not God's. Because God's only standard is that we work together as God's servants, loving our neighbors as God loves us, caring for all of God's creation.

Paul comes in and is brutally honest with this group. He tells them that they are acting immature and that it is time to grow up. He tells them that they are behaving like children, who are fighting over a toy, rather than sharing it and

taking turns. Paul tells them that the church is so much more than who did what when, and who the better minister to serve the church was. In this letter, Paul reminds this group that their church is a work in progress, all churches are works in progress, that are continually growing, building on the gifts of its members, continually doing ministry. No church is complete, no church is good enough, no church is the better than all the others because no church has got it all figured out just yet. All Paul knows is that He planted the seed, someone else watered, but God gave the growth. All Paul knows is that it is really God who is blessing Corinth's ministry and their spiritual gifts to build up the Body of Christ here on earth, not to tear it down. All Paul knows is that any growth, any blessings, any "successful" ministry that the church or he can claim is all because God gave the growth.

And that is what really matters. No matter what we do in the church, it is only by the grace of God and through the blessings of God that we serve and experience growth and renewal for the Kingdom of God.

Paul warns this group at Corinth that when we start keeping track of what we did in the church or who is doing what or who did the ministry better or even when we come to the point to say that we have done enough to serve the Lord, we as people of faith are entering into very dangerous territory. Because when we start thinking like this, we leave God out of the equation. When we start thinking

like this, we have forgotten that all of our efforts and ministry are nothing without God blessing our efforts and our ministries. It is God who strengthens us. It is God who nurtures us. It is God who gives us a creative spirit. It is God who fills us with compassion and passion for the Church and for God's people.

When we start thinking we can do ministry on our own and that we have done this entire amazing ministry by ourselves, we forget God. We put ourselves in the place of God. And that is not a place that we as people of faith were ever supposed to be in as the church or as the Body of Christ here on earth.

Paul's teaching moment for the church at Corinth and for us today is a reminder and a calling that we can never become too satisfied with ourselves as people of faith or as a church because when we do, we lose our vision and we lose our way. We become disoriented, disconnected and fractured because we have forgotten our God, our center, our provider, our sustainer.

It is our responsibility as the church as people of faith to always be working to improve how well we reflect God's love to the world and to ourselves. It is our responsibility to never be satisfied with who we are as a church. We must always remember that we are a work in progress, always working towards the Kingdom of God, always shining as lights for the world, always working to share God's grace with all of God's children. And that is the Good news for us this morning.

Sure things are going well here at Midway Christian Church but we must never become too complacent. We must never become too content. We must never become too satisfied with the way things are going in our church. Because when we do that, we ignore God and assume that we have come this far by our own efforts, not by God's grace and God's blessings. We forget that God has blessed our efforts and that God continues to challenge us to be the people that God created us to be. God is always working. God is always creating. God is always doing. God is always sustaining, redeeming, and nourishing us as people of faith and as the church.

And we are called to do the same by celebrating the fact that we are a work in progress, that we haven't got it all figured out just yet. We will never be at the place where we can say, "We've done enough to serve the Lord and now we can just sit back and enjoy our hard work." Because there is always someone who is hurting. Because there is always someone who needs to hear the good news that they are welcomed at God's table. Because there is always someone who needs to know and experience God's peace and God's grace. Because there is always a child of God who needs to be embraced as part of God's Kingdom. Because there is always the promise of the resurrection, bringing new life to all of God's people.

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We are God's servants, working together, building up the Body of Christ. We are God's servants, working together, helping to bring about the Kingdom of God here on earth. We are God's servants, working together, sharing the Good news for all of God's children.

We are God's servants, working together, and will continue to do so until God says our ministry is complete. We are God's servants, one Body, one belief, one baptism, one Lord.

We are God's servants, working together, building up the Body of Christ, a work in progress until God makes us whole once more.

May we celebrate our calling, knowing that it is only through God's grace and God's blessings that we are blessed enough to claim the name Church. Amen.