

SERMON FOR FEBRUARY 12, 2023

TEXT: 1 CORINTHIANS 3: 1-9

THEME: FOLLOWING JESUS

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, 3 for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? 4 For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human? 5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 8 He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

In the name of Christ, our Leader, Savior, and Lord:

If you were to be a visitor to our preschool, you will notice that when the children of any classroom line up and travel to any place in our facility, they do several things. One is that there is always a line leader. The line leader stands at the front of the line and leads the other children. To facilitate this, our teachers have the rest of the students line up behind the line leader and then follow the line leader by holding onto a ribbon or rope, always going in the direction of the line leader and their teacher, who is always at the front of the line. This protocol ensures that the line leader leads the class in the right

direction, it ensures that the class is all going in a straight line, and that everyone will arrive safely, in one group, to the place where they are going.

The Apostle Paul in writing to the church at Corinth is telling them that they need to not only follow the leader, but also follow the right Leader. As we have noted in the past few weeks in our sermons on 1 Corinthians, the congregation at Corinth were beset with all sorts of divisions, it was the poster child of what a dysfunctional congregation would look like. There were divisions in the church, where some members identified with Paul, others Apollos and still others Peter. Some members thought that they were better than others; others thought that their ideas were more important than that of another. The congregation had so much dysfunction and division that Paul mentions it in his letter by saying: “you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?” The Christians at Corinth were not acting like Christians, they weren’t behaving as Christians should behave, they were behaving like children, in fact, and their behavior showed that they weren’t progressing in their faith and relationship with Jesus.

Today there are issues that divide people as well. The science of demographics separates people into different subgroups, all based on a

number of factors such as race, gender, and income, using the information gleaned to better market a product.

These attempts may be fine in the secular world, but in the Church, we are all one in Jesus Christ. The issues that divided the church at Corinth revolved around people, around personalities, and who is to be the leader in the congregation. When that takes place, then the devil weasels his way in to sow discord and take our attention away from focusing on Jesus. This is why Paul says of the divisions in the church at Corinth: “<sup>5</sup> What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. <sup>6</sup> I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth”.

The Church back in Paul’s day wasn’t built on a person’s personality or ability; it didn’t grow and thrive because of a particular way of doing things. And the Church today isn’t based on a minister’s popularity or business savvy. The Church exists because of Jesus. The Church is His Church. He is the Leader. He is the One who lived, died, and rose again for the Church. He bought the Church with His rosy red blood shed on the cross. The Church doesn’t belong to Paul, or Apollos, to any political party or candidate, it doesn’t belong to any human being, not to you, not to me, the Church belongs to Jesus, for Jesus created the Church and lived and died and rose again for the Church.

The Church is His Church, and His promise is that He will build the Church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it.

But what is, or who is the Church? When I ask this question among our young people in Confirmation classes, they usually answer the question by saying that the church is a building, or a room such as the sanctuary that we worship in today. But that is not how the Apostle Paul defines the Church. Just listen to how Paul describes the church, and who belongs to it when he addresses the church at Corinth: “You are God's field, God's building.” In other words, you, dear brother and sister in Christ, are members of the Church, the body of Christ. You are the Church.

This is why we confess in the Apostles’ Creed: “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting.” The Church is made up of sinners, like you and me, who by the power and the working of the Holy Spirit, believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit makes sinners Christians in the waters of Baptism, when sinners hear the Good News of Jesus, and He strengthens Christians when they go to the Lord’s Supper. The Church is not a building but a community of people, a community of sinners who believe in Jesus Christ, they are the family of God here on earth, who believe in Jesus and live for Jesus. The Holy Spirit has been poured into

your life in your Baptism. Your faith is strengthened in worship, Word and Sacrament. Paul says that you, you all, all of you together, are God's building, you all are the Church. The Holy Spirit has brought you into this family and He strives to keep you in this family of believers when you hear about and believe in Jesus.

But there is, sadly, another family or group of people who do not believe in Jesus. And because they do not believe, they aren't members of the Church, and they do not believe in Jesus, they do not live for Jesus, and as such they will spend a Christless eternity without Jesus in Hell.

That isn't what God wants. Instead, now listen to what God wants: it is His will, God wants all people to believe in Jesus, because God wants all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. God saves sinners. That is why He sent Jesus. That is why Jesus died on the cross. That is why sinners are baptized so that by the power of the Holy Spirit they believe in Jesus. That is why you are here. God loves you in Christ and has blessed you with faith in Jesus, so that whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life. When you think about it, the Bible says that there are really only two religions in the world, those who believe in Jesus and are members of His Church, and those who don't and aren't members of His Church. And those who believe in Jesus, who follow

Jesus, will end up leading others to Jesus, so that by believing in Jesus, they will live eternally with Jesus.

And that is why it is so important to follow Jesus. For Jesus is leading you and guiding you so that you will be safe and secure in His love in this life and will then be with Him in the next life among the joys of eternity.

So continue to believe in and follow our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, for He alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father, except believing in Him. Jesus has purchased you with His own precious blood, His innocent suffering and death. In Baptism you belong to Jesus. By faith you follow Jesus. And as you follow Jesus, others see Jesus; you lead others to follow Jesus, so that they will follow Jesus and be with Jesus now and forever. That is why you are a part of God's family, the Church, a people who love to follow Jesus, and who invite others to follow Jesus as He leads us to eternal life.

Amen