**1 Corinthians 1:1-9 January 19, 2020**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Epistle lesson, 1 Corinthians 1 here re-reading these words, “so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I have to make a confession to you all, that for the past 2 weeks, for me personally, it has felt a little strange standing up here and going about the business of leading the worship service, as I turn to face the altar, and usually the cross, and as I’d usually look up to the stained glass, to now turn and face the scaffolding. To pray to the scaffolding, to bow to the scaffolding….It’s a different kind of experience. To stand and sing the canticles, which are the liturgical songs that come up in the worship service, like the Gloria, and the Sanctus, and the Nunc Dimittis last week in our Divine Service, and even the Venite that we sing today in our service of Matins, where we are standing and facing the altar, some that we know so well that we can sing them without looking at the hymnal and to focus our worship and praise usually toward the cross, or the stained glass depiction of the resurrected Jesus Christ, and now to see…..well…..metal bars, and blank walls, and no cross. It just feels like we are missing something, or that we in our sanctuary are lacking in comparison to other churches and their experience this morning.

Well, these next few weeks we will be traveling back in time, we will put ourselves into the place of the church in Corinth that Paul is writing to as the next few weeks Epistle lessons will all be from 1 Corinthians starting at the very beginning, and we will see how Paul’s words still speak to us today. What was the worship experience of the early church like? Did they worship in large public buildings adorned with beautiful decorations? We know Jesus traveled to the temple, and we can see how the temple was decorated with gold and jewels and how it was this huge house of worship and sacrifice. But the early Christian church didn’t worship in the temple. They worshipped in houses, with little to no decoration, it’s even recorded that most times they didn’t even have enough seating for everyone! You want to talk about a feeling of something isn’t right and we’re missing out, imagine if there weren’t even any chairs or pews for you, and you had to stand the entirety of the service in a large empty space. Or that we didn’t have any means of playing music and had to sing acapella. Or that we didn’t even have any hymnals for you to use and you had to sing hymns from memory. That was the experience of those who heard these words, “Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, to the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.” They then heard the same words you hear every Sunday morning before the message, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

These are words we must hear today because that connection still exists throughout the world of how we are members of a unified Church with those who know that they are sanctified in Christ Jesus, and who call upon his name. Because there are those out there who are worshipping in the most beautiful churches that you can imagine, right now, if you’ve ever been blessed to visit it they are worshipping at St. Lorenz Lutheran Church in Frankenmuth, Michigan. Where the beauty of the sanctuary will take your breath away with stained glass, and painted ceilings, and beautiful arches and church architecture. And we feel that in comparison to them we are missing out and we are lacking in that beauty while our church is under construction. But also at this moment there are those who are worshipping, hidden in someone’s basement for fear of the government finding out and putting them to death. There are those who are calling upon God’s name in hushed whispers who don’t even have a sanctuary in which to sit in. And we are connected to them. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ, just as those who have been worshipping for decades in a beautiful house of worship. We lack nothing when we have Christ.

John the Baptist in our Gospel lesson, a man of the land, a man who eats bugs, and wears camel’s hair, lacked nothing, in that he got to see the very lamb of God himself and baptize him. He lacked nothing in his solid declaration that drew others to Christ and caused his name to decrease. We see it in our Gospel lesson that John loses disciples because of his confession of Jesus as the lamb of God! And even in that loss, he gains, because his work continues in pointing others to the more powerful one. That’s the lesson, that our earthly and sinful desires and temptations to get more for ourselves is humbled in the face of the saints in Scripture, and our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul travels, journeys, is beaten up, faces hardships, and yet doesn’t see it as a detriment or that he lacks anything because he gets to share the good news of Jesus Christ to the world. We must let nothing get in our way of the proclamation of the Gospel, the worldly excuses that trip us up and give us anxiety about sharing the truth must be drowned and die with our sinful selves every day, so that the new man can arise and live before God in truth and purity as His child and His new creation.

Because there are those in our world today that do lack, and have great needs, they aren’t even afforded the gift of life. Isaiah 49:1-7 our Old Testament lesson says, “The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he called my name.” And here, as many churches observe sanctity of life Sunday, we remember those who lose their lives before they are even born. Who lack empathy and aren’t even given a chance. It makes our complaints about different pains, annoyances, and problems disappear when we think of the struggle of others, the hopelessness of mothers in situations where they would give up their child’s life and the guilt they carry for making this decision, and especially the truth that so many don’t even make it to birth. Yet they have life. God knows them, and we serve a God not of wrath but of love, of care, and of mercy. A God who forgives those who chose to end their child’s life, and gives a free and complete forgiveness for all sin.

It’s the gift that sustains us, as Paul writes, “Who will sustain you to the end.” It is the revelation of Jesus Christ, that we are sustained, which is a key theme of the Epiphany season. A time of the light dispelling the darkness, of us seeing Jesus revealed in many and various ways. As a King by the magi, as the second person of the Trinity and God’s own Son at His Baptism, here by John the Baptist as the Lamb of God, the sacrificial price for all sin, who comes to save us all from that punishment of death that hangs over our heads. It’s in the revelation that you are sustained because we live in a world of need and you will be found in need as well. In your health, your finances, your energy and outlook on life, especially in these months. As the days are darker and it’s easy to give in to despair and sadness, when sickness runs rampant and we feel down in the dumps. You will be in need of refreshment, comfort, and the power of God’s Word that sustains you throughout all the seasons of your life to be reminded of his care and how he has provided for your greatest need.

You lack nothing, no matter how sick you are, how hungry you are, how worried you are about the world, this church, this community, this state, this country, anything. You lack nothing in your own personal life no matter what talents, abilities or spiritual gifts God has blessed you with. You don’t have them all, we all are blessed in different ways but that doesn’t mean that you lack anything because you don’t have the gift that you wish you had or that you see in your neighbor, because you have the most important thing. Eternal life in your connection with Jesus Christ. Your faith will wane, and grow weak, you will feel that your life is lacking in relation to the sinful world because of the fact that God’s Word calls sin, sin and doesn’t just tell you to do whatever you want to do, but God is faithful to you Paul writes. “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” Fellowship, the Greek word is koinonia, fellowship of standing together as a family of faith in a crowded house, reading a letter together from the one who started your church, that’s what the church in Corinth experienced. Fellowship in growing together and making changes, and lacking in decoration and beauty for a time so that we may see a proper adornment of our own sanctuary in the weeks to come.

A close fellowship with each other, where we can confess and sing together “Chief of Sinners Though I Be” and also, just a few minutes later, “In Thee is Gladness.” So come on the journey, go back in time and see what troubles the church in Corinth experienced. Travel with us through 1 and 2 Thessalonians in Bible Class and see what they experienced. Put yourself into their shoes and see how the problems of today are actually not that new, and how sin has influenced the church from the beginning. But also see the power of God’s Word and how it transforms the lives of those who gather together to hear it. Whether it be in the most extravagant sanctuary, or even if it be in the basement of someone’s house.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.