**1 Corinthians 3:1-9 February 16, 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, the continuation of 1 Corinthians beginning at the start of chapter 3 here re-reading these words. “But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This past Friday’s celebration of Valentine’s Day reminded me of a rather embarrassing moment in my life. Back when I was in 6th grade I had a girlfriend. It wasn’t much more than talking on the phone and dancing with each other at school dances, but at the time it felt like one of the world’s greatest love stories. I was a romantic at heart, and so one year on Valentine’s Day I remember wondering what I should get my girlfriend, and going off of the example of romantic movies and just the cliché’ things you think you should do, I, in 6th grade, wrote a love poem for my girlfriend. I poured my heart into this project and even succeeded in having the poem rhyme. I gave this poem to my girlfriend, and her gift to me in return was a 12 pack of diet coke. We were on different wavelengths, almost in different worlds. I was doing things that would be done in a serious relationship and she was doing things that you would expect from two people being just a little more than friends in middle school. To be fair looking back on the whole experience it’s safe to say that neither of us was ready for any kind of serious romantic relationship.

Paul says, “I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it.” They weren’t ready for the serious stuff, the deep teachings of Christ, and so Paul didn’t feed it to them when he first met with the church in Corinth. He gave them the milk. The food of the infants, which is what he calls them. “Infants in Christ.” Was this an insult? Hardly. Everyone starts somewhere and you can’t fault someone for not knowing everything if they hadn’t been taught. Paul isn’t speaking about literal food here he’s describing the teaching. When you first learn about something you start as an infant. But eventually you have to grow from infancy to solid foods, to something with a greater sustenance. But they weren’t ready. As we looked at earlier in our study of 1 Corinthians, they had given in to tribalism especially when it came to those who went on the side of Paul and others on the side of Apollos, some who followed after Cephas or Peter and some who had a wrong interpretation of revelation from Jesus Christ. They thought that the man is what mattered rather than the message.

Which shows their lack of understanding and knowledge. They were infants. The man doesn’t matter because the man can’t possibly create faith or cause it to grow. The man who fills this pulpit can’t take credit for the faith in your hearts, I can’t stand up here and brag about how you came today to see me. I can’t take credit for your faith even if I was the one who baptized you. I can’t take credit for your faith growing because that too is the work of the Holy Spirit in your heart. Being a pastor therefore is a job where there are no awards or huge tangible and observable moments where I knew that I did something, because anything that is done is the work of the Holy Spirit in your heart. And it’s not different from your professions and vocations as well. Any good you do is the work of God. Any inclination to do good is the work of God. Any change in your life that is positive and beneficial to you practically or spiritually, or both, is the work of God in your life. To Him be all the glory now and forevermore.

To be spiritual people means to see this reality, but the Corinthians weren’t spiritual people yet. They had given in to jealousy and strife, there was quarreling amongst them, they had to be reminded of the power of the cross and to not fall away in the trap of lofty wisdom and fancy words. To not be tempted and led away like some kind of uninitiated novice or ignorant member of the church. You come in as an infant but you don’t stay there, Paul explains later in 1 Corinthians which we find in chapter 13:11, “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.” You can’t stay a child when it comes to your faith and life can’t be lived rooted in one place because life is always in a constant state of change. You can’t stay an infant. Paul chastises the people because they hadn’t grown from their fleshly nature, from the old habits they had before they knew about all that God had done for them. And so I ask you today. Are you a spiritual person? Or a person of the flesh? Are you simply a novice and infant in your faith? Or have you grown to a higher spiritual maturity? I’m not talking about age because it’s meaningless in the grand scheme of things when we talk about the spirit and about faith. You could have been a member of this church for your entire life and still have the faith of an infant if you never wanted to listen, learn, or grow. Your actions reflect your attitude and identity. They show if you respect and cherish God’s Word and God’s Worship or if you neglect them and see them as meaningless.

The spiritually immature and childish say that faith is something that can exist without sustenance and care. The spiritually immature and childish say that there is no benefit to worshipping together as a family of faith and receiving God’s Holy Sacrament. The spiritually immature say, “I have faith in God but I have no need for what goes on in that church up on the hill, I have no need to support it or anyone who goes there. I only need it so I have a place to be baptized, married, and buried. It’s nothing more than that, oh sure I’m spiritual, I’m not of the flesh, I just don’t do spiritual things.” That’s thinking and behaving in a human way, a fleshly way, an egotistical and self-elevating way, a “I’m better than God and I know better than God” way. And in that ignorance your fledging faith will wither and die. You can’t stay still, you grow, or you die.

God gives the growth. There’s the truth of the Spirit that should bring you an overwhelming wave of comfort and joy, it is not in a worldly way that you grow as if you were working a muscle group, you can’t force the growth of your faith it is God that makes it grow. It is God that grows the church. It is God that works in the hearts of even the most spiritually immature and brings about maturity and understanding. This doesn’t mean that you do nothing, and that you give up on others or yourself, it simply means that it’s not all about you. Paul says of his own work, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.” Paul earlier states in verse 5 of chapter 3, “What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed as the Lord assigned to each.” Through whom not in whom. Spiritual maturity means that you see yourself for what you are. A sinner in need of a Savior. It doesn’t mean that you learn more and therefore see yourself as better than anyone else, if anything it means that the more you learn about God and His Word the less you think of yourself and the more you realize what God has done for you. Your growth of knowledge is a shrinking of self. Because God gives growth, and God gives life, and God gives care and love, and forgiveness, God gives a laundry list that you couldn’t possibly measure of good and amazing gifts here in his house. Gifts that you need to grow. Gifts that are completely and totally free.

You may not be ready to dive into the deep complexities of systematic theology found in dogmatic texts like Francis Pieper or even sections of the Book of Concord. You may not have any interest in studying Greek or Hebrew so that you can read the Bible in the languages that they were written. You may struggle even with the proper definition of theological doctrines like justification and sanctification and that’s ok! You don’t have to pass a quiz to come to worship, you don’t have to elevate yourself in knowledge and be initiated to some kind of secret, elite group of Christians to come to Bible Study whether it’s on Sunday or Tuesday. No one will throw you out. These are places to grow, to learn, to go from infant, to toddler, to child. But I urge you to challenge yourself to learn and don’t give up on God’s Word. Find a book, a subject, a hymn, some facet of God’s Word to study and be passionate about. Don’t give up. Grow with God.

Hebrews 4:12, “For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” This is a place for the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. If you look at the back of your bulletin you’ll find the mission of Trinity Lutheran Church in Onekama, and it is to serve. The first E in Serve is to be “equipped for life.” Let us see how God equips us with His Holy Word to grow from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity, and therefore teach others as spiritual people so that God may grow their faith and we may be his instruments to do His good will and to serve him.

Amen.

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

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