

Text: 1 Corinthians 1.1-9  
St Stephen's

Aug 31<sup>st</sup>, 2008  
Sun

## The Doctor Is In

### My Summer:

- Our vacation was wonderful: get away to Lake Michigan



- Time with Mom and Dad and kids (Photo)



- Projects around the home, reading, lots of bike rides – **a great time** away.

### This Fall:

- I am **excited about this fall** for the parish: children's, student teams are great. Fellows in 4<sup>th</sup> year; pastoral staff strong; new 11:15 service; full educational offerings in the Middle Hour; exciting Missions weekend and Fall Family festival.
- Early this October we take an historic vote as a diocese on realigning to a different province of the Anglican Communion.

- This fall we are studying **1 Corinthians**...

## Ancient Corinth

- **Large:** The city was destroyed by Rome in 146 BC, and rebuilt by Caesar in 46 B.C. as a Roman colony. By the time of Paul's mission 100 years later Corinth had grown to over half a million people.
- **Independent:** When Corinth was rebuilt by the Romans, it was populated by '**freedmen**' – slaves who had been awarded their freedom, sometimes in return for their willingness to pioneer a new city. That gave Corinth a rough character, they were fiercely independent – sort of like Australia at the start, or a bit like the wild west in America. And independent they were.
- **Wealthy:** Corinth was located in ancient Greece at a geographic crossroads of land and sea travel:



Because it commanded land and sea trade routes it had become a significant commercial center, attracting trade and economic development. Corinth was a prosperous city.

- **Diverse:** All the people who flowed through Corinth brought a great deal of diversity to the city. They brought their ethnic and religious backgrounds, and in Corinth they found a welcome. Multicultural, we would call it today, with a distinctive Roman flavor.
- **Immoral:** Corinthian immorality was proverbial. Behind the city some 2000 feet above sea level was the rocky mount called the Acro-corinth. This is a view from the top: (**Photo**)



On its flat summit was the temple of Aphrodite. Multiple ancient sources tell about how from her temple each night 1000 female slaves roamed the city's streets as prostitutes. Corinth was the **red light district** of the Roman Empire.

Roll it all together and you find a city that is a little bit like **New York and Los Angeles and Las Vegas**. To that city, Paul brought the gospel.

I wonder if you have **noticed something** over your years. I'm sure you have. It has to do with the relationship between **the world and the church**. You might remember that Jesus on his last night prayed a special prayer. Several of his phrases describe his followers. He prayed...

*They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world... As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.*

John 17:16,18

That is who we are. "Sent **into** the world", but **not 'of'** the world. What Jesus means by this is that we are **no longer defined by the world's values** and aspirations. Even though we still live in the world, **our core identity** comes from Christ, not from the culture. This is what happens when he steps into your life. **The core** of who you are **begins to change**, and then everything begins to change.

But sometimes this **doesn't seem to happen** with Christians. We **get stuck**. You've seen it, and you have probably wrestled with it. All of a sudden it seems like **the world is in the church**.

That was the problem at Corinth. The church in Corinth was full of people who had been wildly converted, spectacularly converted, and filled in extraordinary ways with the Holy Spirit. But it seemed like **they brought all of the old life into the church** with them. Instead of the church being in the culture, on mission in the culture, evangelizing the world – the world had **evangelized the church**.

So the Church at Corinth had developed a bad reputation:

**Strident Individualism:** they had a problem with any kind of authority. They thought they heard straight from God and they didn't need any leaders, any Apostle telling them otherwise.

**Spiritual Pride:** They knew they were really spiritual, anointed, 'hot' – but they weren't so sure about Paul – or about his gospel.

**Immoral Behavior:** Paul said they were doing things even the pagans wouldn't do – and they were proud about it!

**Divisions in the Church:**

*It has been reported to me... that there is quarreling among you, my brothers.*

1 Corinthians 1:11

They thought they were better than everyone else, they thought their behavior didn't matter, they fought with everyone including Paul, and they were rejecting the gospel that gave them life. Sound familiar?

**GAFCON small group photo:**



When I was at the GAFCON conference in Israel this summer I was in a

small group with four Nigerian and Singapore Bishops. This photo is of a couple of them. They were wonderful leaders, wonderful pastors. I loved them. There were **three American pastors in the group** and the first time we got together **the Africans came right at us.** *"What is it with you Americans? Why are you always so independent? Why do you do everything your own way? Why do you think you are the only ones who hear God? Why can't you submit to authority?"*

It took a lot of talking to convince them that we are not that way. But **Americans are that way.** It is easy for the world to get into the church. For culture to become greater than Christ.

1 Corinthians is **a letter for our time.** All of **the issues** facing the Anglican Communion are here. Authority. Autonomy. Communion. Behavior. Sex. Marriage. Super Spirituality. Apostolic Leadership. Lawsuits. Worship. Theology. And in it all, Gospel.

In this letter, Paul is engaging what is arguably his **greatest pastoral challenge.** He is heartbroken about what has happened to this church, and for the sake of healing and correction he writes. He is a shepherd tending his sheep, a physician caring for his patient.

Paul's first approach to them is to **remind them** of some important things. Would you say the word, **'remember'** with me... Have you ever noticed that **your 'rememberer' doesn't work well?** You remember the things you ought to forget, and you forget the things you want to remember!

Don't you have a long list of things that people have done to you? You remember every single one of them!!! Never forget!!! But you have forgotten every time they have done something good to you! That is why Jesus said to do some things, week after week, **'in remembrance of me'** – because **our rememberers are broken.** The Corinthians had broken rememberers. They kept **forgetting** important things... So Paul **reminds them with answers to three important questions:**

## Who Are We?

As he starts, Paul reminds them who they are and whose they are. You can forget who you are.

*I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus, just as he did for all people everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.*

1 Corinthians 1:2

Look at the phrases I have underlined... You are **God's church in Corinth**. In Sewickley. In Moon. In Pittsburgh. In QV. At College. At the office. At home. At a Steeler's game!! **You are God's** – God's own people.

Often we think of God's 'calling' in terms of **guidance**, or vocation. I was 'called' to marry Becca, I say. Or I was 'called' to be your pastor.

But there is a larger, more important **calling that underlies** all the issues of guidance in our lives. It is '*called by God to be his... and to be holy* – Called **to Jesus** and called **to be like Jesus**. Wherever you are, whatever you do. In Sewickley. In Moon. In Pittsburgh. In QV. At College. At the office. At home. At a Steeler's game!! **That's who we are**. Whose we are. **His and holy**. **Remember...**

## Where are We Going?

*He will keep you strong to **the end** so that you will be free from all blame on **the day** when our Lord Jesus Christ returns.*

1 Corinthians 1:8 (NLT)

It is easy to forget where we are going in life. You get pushed and pulled with the press of the days Look at the phrases I have underlined – "**the end**", and "**the day**". You know what they refer to – the day of judgment. Aren't you excited about that day? It is coming.

They had forgotten all about that day in Corinth. They thought that day had already come, that they had **already arrived**, that they were already perfect.

In the view of the bible, **the world is not right**, not the way it should be. And neither are we. No one seriously argues with this. Down deep, the bible tells us, the world is **longing to be set right**. So are people. In the language of the bible, the **gospel** is when the fix has started and the **judgment** is the time when the fix will be completed, and the world will be renewed.

Here's his promise:

*you will be free from all blame on **the day** when our Lord Jesus Christ returns.*

**Remember...**

## **How Will We Get There?**

*I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him — so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift...*

1 Corinthians 1: 4-5,7

What is just so stunning about this introduction is that **Paul starts out by giving thanks**, extended and heartfelt thanks, for a church that is causing him all kinds of trouble and worry. They are **hardly blameless**. But he thanks God for them. That is what we call grace. Grace looks at people, even people who are solid trouble, and never overlooks the good things that God has done in them. No matter what they have done.

**When there is a problem** to be spoken about, grace always starts with thanksgivings, with praise.

What he is so thankful for is how abundantly God had given to them. Say, '*given you in Christ Jesus*'. Don't you have a long list that could go under that heading?

Paul does this not just to be what we would call tactful, but because of something even more important. Paul knows that grace has the **first** word in people's lives. And he knows that grace will have the **last** word. And he knows that grace will have the **strongest** word.



This is the grave marker of Charles Williams, poet and friend of CS Lewis and JRR Tolkien. I went to his grave in Oxford when I was there, because I wanted to see the words on his gravestone for myself. You can barely make them out, and can't see them in my photo. 3 simple words that he had engraved: "Under the Mercy". That is how we get from here to there: **he presses his mercy more and more deeply** upon us until it seeps into every dark corner of our heart, infecting every thought, every aspiration, every dream, every deed.

*God will do this, for he is faithful to do what he says, and he has invited you into partnership with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

1 Corinthians 1: 9 (NLT)

**Faithful.** What he has started, he will finish. What he has promised, he will deliver. What he has begun, he will complete. And it will happen in **partnership** with Jesus, in **fellowship** with him, in **friendship** with him.

**Who are you?** His and holy

**Where are we going?** All the way to the last day, and it is going to be great.

**How will we get there?** With Jesus, our friend. Our faithful friend.

These things are important to remember.