

Scriptures: John 1:29-42; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Glimpses of the Kingdom

Last Sunday, on Baptism of the Lord Sunday, we launched a new sermon series, “Glimpses of the Kingdom.” We heard about how at Jesus’ baptism, the Trinity was revealed – the Father in the voice from heaven, the Son coming up out of the water, and the Holy Spirit descending and lighting like a dove on the Son. That event marked the beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry. This morning we heard in our gospel lesson that John the Baptist recognized what Jesus’ mission was, just as it was beginning – “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn. 1:29). Andrew, one of John’s disciples, started following Jesus from that point, along with his brother, Simon Peter.

Through the season of Epiphany, we’ll consider several Scripture passages, and what they reveal to us about the kingdom of God, and what it means for us as citizens of it. So today, I’d like to look at the epistle reading on the lectionary calendar, from 1 Corinthians 1:1-9. Before we dive into it, I want to give just a little background information, while giving you time to turn to it in your Bible. Corinth was the crossroads of the Roman Empire. It’s located on the Aegean Sea, along the coast of modern-day Greece, and it was a trading post for Rome and the East.

Archaeologists have found ancient Chinese coins in Corinth, dating to the time period when Paul wrote his letters to the church there. So there were traders from all over the world in the town. When the epistles were written, the population of the city was estimated to be 650,000 people. It had at least twelve temples in it. The main temple was dedicated to Aphrodite, a Greek fertility goddess, which employed a thousand prostitutes. Corinth was the “Sin City” of its day – in fact, the Greeks made up a verb, “to Corinthianize,” which meant “to practice sexual immorality.” As you can imagine, the church located in a town like this was bound to have some serious problems. Let’s take a look at what they’re told in our epistle reading this morning.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9.

Being Called in “Sin City”

Our reading starts out with a brief introduction, letting the people in the church at Corinth know who has written the letter to them. The author identifies himself as Paul. Pay close attention to what we’re told: “Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – their Lord and ours:” (1 Cor. 1:1-2). Paul’s

letting them know he's the author – the ideas in the letter are his. Paul also has an assistant helping put pen to paper so to speak, named Sosthenes. Notice how Paul describes himself – “called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.”

Church, in that phrase, “called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,” who's doing the work? Is it Paul or Sosthenes? Maybe we need to look at it another way – who called Paul? Jesus Christ – God. He does the work. Jesus does the heavy lifting, we reap the benefits. In a nutshell, that's the big take-away for today. Jesus does the work – those who follow Him reap the benefits of His work.

Another thing to point out here is who the letter's written to. Originally, it was for the church at Corinth. But it also includes us. “To those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere,” that's you and me, today, friends. Notice here, it doesn't say “being sanctified,” “being made holy,” “being changed;” it's “sanctified and called to be holy,” period. Those guys in the Corinthian church who would visit the temple of Aphrodite on Friday night, and then come to church on Sunday morning – you know there had to be some of those – not one thing they did came as a surprise to Jesus. Even in wrestling with that sin, they're sanctified by Him. We're already sanctified by the work Jesus did on the cross for us – and now we let His own Holy Spirit lead us and live into that call “to be holy.”

The next thing in our text, “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” (verse 3), is a part of Paul's greeting to the church, while verse 4 shows Paul's general attitude to the church. Paul writes, “I always thank God for you because of His grace given you in Christ Jesus,” (verse 4). Notice again, Paul's not saying anything about them doing great things – it's all focused on God doing the work. Giving grace to them – to us – through Jesus Christ. Paul's expressing an attitude of gratitude. He's grateful for all that God has done, and he's praising God for doing the work.

Enriched In Every Way

Paul goes on, “For in Him [Jesus] you have been enriched in every way – in all your speaking and in all your knowledge – because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you,” (verses 5-6). When Jesus came down from heaven to be born into our filth – our mess – and then went to the cross, God gave us His very best. In Jesus, God has truly enriched us in every way! He's given us citizenship in His eternal kingdom, and made us co-heirs with Christ. That's remarkable!

On Wednesday, we had a celebration of life out here, and I sent an email out to you on Monday night about it, asking for help, and letting you know the building would be occupied most of that day. I had this gut feeling there would be someone at Tommy's funeral asking questions about Jesus, our faith, and what they need to do, or

know, to be assured of their salvation. I know, I call it a gut feeling, but it was the Holy Spirit prepping me to be ready. I'll give credit where credit's due. I just assumed it would be someone in Tommy's family seeking answers to questions they had.

Instead, as I was walking through the kitchen, a gentleman – not part of their family – walked up and asked me about our baptism. I looked at him and said, "Oh! You're the one I'm supposed to be talking to!" Long story short, we sat back in the chapel for half an hour or so just talking about Jesus and how much He loves us. Friends, sometimes we do things, and "jump through the hoops," occasionally even for the wrong reasons, but God is faithful, even when we aren't.

That's the bottom line. We aren't faithful people. Ordinary human beings are not faithful. We disobey. If we were faithful and obedient, Adam and Eve would've never ate the fruit, and Jesus wouldn't have needed to come and make things right. Jesus knew that humans are unfaithful before He ever went to the cross, but He did anyways because He loves us.

Not Lacking

So, here again, today Paul tells us we'll be enriched in our speaking and knowledge because of Jesus – and friends, you better believe it! He puts the words in our mouths if we completely yield ourselves to His leading! Listen to what else Paul says we have, "Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed," (verse 7). In other Bible translations, verse 7 reads, "So that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ," (NRSV).

See, church, when we trust Jesus, He gives us spiritual gifts. He gives us talents and abilities we otherwise wouldn't have, primarily of speech and knowledge, tying it back to verse 5. The question then becomes, "how do we get these spiritual gifts of speech and knowledge?" I've got an answer for you to that particular question – you trust Jesus Christ. And then you stay plugged in! Plugged into His word – the Bible. Plugged into Him in your thoughts – we call that prayer. These are things we should be doing every day.

There are other actions or behaviors, we can do to assist in the process – like being regularly plugged into our church family, doing acts of kindness to others – even when they don't deserve it. We have various events going on here at New Hope, in the local church, and in other ministries beyond the walls. Tuesday evening we'll be preparing a meal and leading a worship service at Alpha Center in Sidney. Usually there's anywhere between fifty and sixty people down there who are barely scraping by to make ends meet. Some of them are probably addicted to drugs. Several of them are homeless.

Mimicking Jesus

Our society, and even some self-identifying Christians, would say that “they’ve reaped what they’ve sown,” and couldn’t care less about helping them. That’s the sad, and sorry truth, friends. But the Christ we find in Holy Scriptures cares for the down and out. He loves the marginalized. He extends His grace to me and you – people who don’t deserve it – because He loves us despite all our flaws and shortcomings.

If we want to follow Jesus, we should want to mimic Him – we should be doing all the things we see Him doing on the pages of Scripture. Studying, praying, spending time growing relationships with others. Back in the late 1960’s, Disney released a cartoon movie, *The Jungle Book*, based on Rudyard Kipling’s book. In it, a young boy named Mowgli is abandoned by people, and adopted by animals in the jungle. One of the animals Mowgli encounters is an orangutan named King Louie. Listen to what King Louie tells him in the first minute of this video. (Video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ud5J7Ye332I>, just play to 1:00).

If we’re truly His followers, then we should be mimicking the things we see Jesus doing on the pages of the Bible. When we yield ourselves to Jesus as King of us – and get out of the way to let His Holy Spirit nudge, guide, and lead us – then, like Paul, we can have assurance. We can feel the certainty of it in the core of our being. “He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ,” (verse 8). How do we know this to be true? The Bible tells us, “God, who has called you into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful,” (verse 9). He’s forever faithful friends, even when we aren’t!

Prayer: Steadfast God, You have enriched and enlightened us by the revelation of Your eternal Christ. Comfort us in our mortality and strengthen us to walk the path of Your desire, so that by word and deed we may spread the gracious news of Your faithfulness and love. Amen.