

Welcome

Announcements: Giving Options-online, offering, QR code. Special offering for January-Verde Valley Homeless Coalition; United Women of Faith Gathering on Tuesday, January 20th at 1PM; Volunteers needed in hospitality-see Diana Smith to help out; Ash Wednesday Services will be on Wednesday, February 18th at 5:30PM.

Fellowship of Love Song

Call to Worship

L: Listen, O coast lands.

P: Pay attention, people of God.

L: We are called to be a light to the nations.

P: We are created to sing of God's salvation.

L: Shout praise for God's faithfulness.

P: Rejoice in our many gifts.

L: Come! let us worship!

Unison Prayer

Holy One, may our spirits be polished arrows in the quiver of your searching love.

May our words ring true with shouts of praise.

Use us, Gracious God, as instruments of your mercy and compassion.

Fashion us into vessels of your abiding Spirit, that a world torn by brokenness and pain might touch your healing love

through our fellowship with you and with one another. Amen.

L: As we come to this time of offering, let us remember that giving is an opportunity to respond to God's generosity with our own.

Offering/Song

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9 NRSVue

1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

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² To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

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³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

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⁴ I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus,

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⁵ for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—

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⁶ just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—

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⁷ so that you are not lacking in any gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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⁸ He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the partnership of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Message: "United in Faith: Embracing the Journey of Community"

Allow me to share with you one of my favorite John Wesley quotes. "The bible knows nothing of solitary religion." The necessity of bringing up this quote right now will become clear as we go through our message today, but I wanted to start out our reflection with some roots in our religious heritage. John Wesley when he founded the Methodist movement founded a community group that came together in mutual support and love in order to become more like Christ. This is not the only way to view Christian community, but it is the one that is at the heart and soul of Methodist congregations, we are together to seek to be more like Christ and we do so by supporting one another.

Today we started in 1 Corinthians. We will be in 1 Corinthians for a number of weeks, taking us all the way to Ash Wednesday. I have spoken on the Corinthian letters in the past and I deliberately chose them this year so that we could spend time reflecting at the beginning of the year as a way for us to reflect on community. Since we are starting in this letter we need to set up a time line and dive into the context of

the letter in order to understand our passage today. This will set us up for future success in understanding this letter.

Let's start with a timeline. It is thought that Paul founded the church in Corinth sometime shortly before 51 CE. This church was founded and composed of Gentile converts, freemen, and slaves. The city of Corinth is a historically important city. It hosted the Isthmian Games, a rival of the Olympic games. It was destroyed by Rome in its conquest, but later re-established by Rome as a Roman colony. This is important because it imparts special status to the citizens who had been there several generations by this point. The city of Corinth was also an upwardly mobile community. It was possible for a person to become a Roman citizen and become wealthy. This is why it is important to note that there were freemen in the congregations, people who were upwardly mobile socially speaking. The city was also the home to a large temple of Athena. Athena being the goddess of wisdom meant that there were implications for being wise in the community.

Getting back to the church Paul had left it somewhere in 51 CE. Paul penned this letter sometime in 52 or 53 CE. In verse 11, Paul reports that he had received reports from Cloe's people. We don't really know who Cloe is but can assume she was someone of some influence and perhaps some means. Later in Chapter 7 Paul states that he received a letter from the Corinthian church asking for guidance. This next part is beyond the scope of this brief series but after Paul wrote this letter we are aware that he wrote another one, and potentially a second letter before he wrote what we have as 2nd Corinthians. This comes from 2nd Corinthians and what Paul says in his letter.

What we have here is the beginning is a snapshot of a longer communication stream between Paul and the church of Corinth. This church has issues that it is facing, and Paul is going to try and deal with them. To do so Paul starts the letter as we have read today.

Now when we read things we kind of expect things to be written in a certain way. Let me give you a negative example, an example of where writing goes wrong. Have you ever looked up a recipe, maybe you wanted to try something, or you heard of an interesting dish that you want to try. Ever go to a website and you just want the recipe but instead of seeing it front and center you have what seems to be 10 pages of some rambling story about how they made this recipe one dark and stormy night. To say that's frustrating is generous.

IN a positive way Paul starts an ancient letter the way all the Romans of the time would have done it, by introducing the things he is going to talk about in a sneaky way. Paul introduces here that he is called to ministry, special ministry of being an apostle however as he talks about it he reinforces who the people in the church of Corinth are. He acknowledges that they come from diverse backgrounds. That what brings them here is service to Christ and that they are all in ministry as a community together.

Paul is laying the groundwork for the church of Corinth to understand that they are a body together, working together and dealing with issues together. I am not getting in to specific on the issues right now, but we will deal with them as we start to journey through this letter. What we need to know explicitly is that Paul is telling the church of Corinth (and by extension us) that we are a community together, that no community is perfect and that we are called to work on that again and again. Together.

I think one of the problems that we face as a church today is a shopping complex. Hear me out. If you go to Frys and they don't have the item you want to buy for dinner what do you do? Odds are you go to another store. The cartoon show Family Guy had a joke about this type of things a few years ago, the town was destroyed and they were living in an apocalyptic wasteland. They were discussing with friends about rebuilding, and the conversation was building up hope. One of the kids said, "yes and we'll build two Denny's on opposite sides of town so we can say lets not go to that one lets go to the good Denny's."

We do this in church, we shop around. Heaven forbid you don't like what I have to say. Heaven forbid you are expected to work on yourself, or the church has expectations for you. I know this from experience. Over the years I have had plenty of people threaten to hold their tithes if I didn't say things that they agreed with...every single Sunday. Instead of realizing that we are a community-working together seeking to improve together. Instead, we pick up our toys and go somewhere else, we shop around as if being the body of Christ is a commodity and not a way of life that we commit to being in together.

In this series we are going to explore what it means to be in community together. We are going to see that the church of Corinth didn't agree with everything, and we are going to see that perhaps some of the things we were taught about this letter just aren't as true as you may have thought. As you go about your week this week think about what it means to be in a community together, with people you both agree with and disagree with. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer/The Lord's Prayer

Song

Benediction

Song

Goodbye