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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
January 29, 2016
4th Sunday after Epiphany

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 9:1-4; Matthew 4:12-23

Hymns: 398; 421; 408; 399:3 (248:1-3)

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

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. ¹¹For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's *household*, that there are contentions among you. ¹²Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." ¹³Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

¹⁴I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. ¹⁶Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. ¹⁷For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Manifestations of Christ's glory

During Epiphany we focus on how the glory of Jesus was revealed so that the people of this world might know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Our gospel lesson this morning quoted our Old Testament lesson and marked that this prophecy was fulfilled. It emphasized that Jesus would dwell in Galilee of the Gentiles. That is one of the ways that Jesus' glory was revealed to the world: He taught and healed not only among His own, the people of the Jews, but also among the Gentiles of Galilee and the surrounding territories, going as far as the region of Tyre and Sidon.

Our gospel lesson also marked the beginning of Jesus calling and gathering the twelve disciples. They would be His apostles, Jesus' special ambassadors of the gospel who would go into all the world, proclaiming the glory of Christ.

This leads us to the connection to our text. Paul was one of Jesus' apostles who was called especially to proclaim Christ's glory to the Gentiles. Jesus' glory was revealed and is continuing to be revealed not only by the Lord's Jesus' own teaching and healing ministry, but by those whom He has called to be His disciples. This is an especially poignant message for us to consider on the Sunday of our annual meeting, which in many ways is intended to set the tone for our year in ministry. So then with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the inspired Word let us consider our role of --

THEME: Glorifying Christ in Our Church Life.

Paul wrote this epistle to a Christian congregation which he dearly loved, a congregation that was located in the midst of one of the world's busiest cities, one that was rife with the ways of the world in every way one might imagine. There were the philosophers of this world, there was idolatry that involved some blatant immorality. There was the pursuit of wealth with covetousness, and everything else that goes on in the world. In the midst of all this was a congregation of Christians who were being influenced by the world far more than they realized. The result of this influence was that they were not glorifying the Lord Jesus in their congregational life anywhere near as well as they should have been. Paul starts out by exhorting them in --

I. Glorifying Christ with Sound Doctrine.

1 Corinthians 1:10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Basically they had lost their focus on true doctrine they had become distracted and preoccupied with other things. Teaching and applying the truth of God's Word had suffered. People were saying different things and these different teachings and practices were permitted to coexist, false teachings, incorrect positions standing right next to sound doctrine as if they were of equal weight and legitimacy. It was a part of their Greek culture to always be hearing or advancing some new idea, some new philosophy, some new *truth*. That was what Paul had also encountered in Athens, and why there was some interest in what he had to say. However God's truth does not change with the ideas and philosophy of man. God's truth is not equal to the ideas and philosophies of man!

Paul instructed them that they needed to speak the same thing. He was talking about doctrine, the teachings of God's truth, not politics or social issues, or sports, or personalities, which was a major distraction within the Corinthian congregation.

In today's world this exhortation is as important as ever. Especially in America people like new ideas. Freedom of religion is often mistakenly interpreted as saying that all religions are of equal legitimacy and equally effective in saving mankind from sin. Nothing could be further from the truth, and yet that is held by much of society as being the truth, proposing that we all worship the same supreme being but simply use different names. We all are going to the same place, but simply using different highways. Alongside this is the concept of personal truth. We are told, "You don't have a monopoly on truth." or "What I think is truth is just as true (at least for me) as what you say is truth."

Two points, on the face of it, that just can't stand. If one position is true, then the contrary position isn't. If one truly believes something it is nonsensical to accept that contrary statements about God and salvation could also be true. If you agree to such a position you really don't believe what you have been professing to

believe. Secondly, it's not *my* truth, or *your* truth as if it originated with me or any other man. It's *God's* truth which has been revealed to us in His Word. His Word is truth. His Word reveals the only way to eternal life, which is in Christ Jesus. **Doctrine matters!** True teachings about Christ glorify our Savior before the world and lead sinners to repentance and life. Alternative teachings, whether they come from philosophy, or science, or simply your neighbor's musings, are false, and detract from Jesus' glory and lead men to perdition.

So hear the words of the Apostle to the Corinthians and realize how significant they are for us also as a congregation. It is our purpose, our mission to glorify Jesus before the world that people around us in our community, and throughout the world may know Jesus as Savior. To that end let us --

II. Avoid Dimming the Light of Christ's Glory

One can't really dim the Christ's glory. He is the glory of the Divine Majesty. One may however hinder others from seeing that glory. One may work as a dark shade on a lamp that dim's that glory in other people's eyes.

This is what was happening in Corinth. The congregation had gotten themselves distracted from the presentation of the gospel and rather caught up in some petty squabbles. They had gotten caught up in the personalities of different apostles and evangelists. It was very much like the squabbles the disciples had on a couple of different occasions during Jesus' ministry concerning which of them was greatest. In Corinth it wasn't the disciples arguing amongst themselves, but others discussing the merits of different apostles. It got bitter. It caused silly cliques to arise within the congregation. Some identified with Paul, others with Peter, still others with Apollos, and still others with Christ. With this becoming the focus of the congregation the gospel of Christ suffered. And really it was of no importance. Was Paul crucified for the sins of the world, or Peter or Apollos? Of course not! Jesus is the way of life. The preacher doesn't matter.

Of course it can be any issue that can cause such division. We've seen it in this congregation in years gone by. Issues that should

have and could have been settled in Christian love, and with the Lord's guidance and blessing served to tear the congregation apart and detract from the mission of the gospel. I've seen even sillier squabbles in congregations. I've seen congregations divided over the organ they were buying, or the type of flooring to be installed in the church kitchen. Sometimes merely perceived slights, or misunderstandings over something said in a Bible class or a meeting. Yes, at times politics can divide and distract from the gospel. Even sports or social events have been known to cause such sinful havoc within a congregation.

For several years now we here at St. Paul's have known a wondrous harmony that is centered in Christian love. What a blessing that has been for us. But have we made the most of these years of harmony and love? We still need to sharpen our focus on the gospel of Christ.

In our text the Spirit would encourage us in --

III. Being True to Our Calling.

1 Corinthians 1:17 "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect"

Removing these words of Paul from context we must be careful not to think that Paul was in any way diminishing the great commission in which Jesus directed the disciples to make disciples of all the nations, baptizing and teaching. It is also true that Paul did on occasion baptize individuals, as did Peter and the others, including Philip who was called as a deacon. Paul generally allowed for the local pastor to baptize as a function of the congregation's ministry, and it would have been wrong for them to delay baptism for prolonged periods until Paul or another apostle would come for a visit.

Paul's point is that his calling was the proclamation of the gospel. Paul wanted the Corinthian congregation to be true to their calling as well. They needed to be true and focused on proclaiming the gospel.

Many today are focused on a social message, directing the people in their pews to action in making this world a better place, a more loving place. Often the message is characterized as being more relevant to our modern world. Sometimes such messages call for political action, or political correctness, or the acceptance of people “*where they are*,” ignoring the need for repentance and forgiveness. Jesus didn’t accept people “*where they were*!” While Jesus reached out to Jew and Gentiles to rich and poor to men and women, He called them to repentance, telling them to “go and sin no more!”(John 8:11) Jesus moved people from being lost and condemned sinners to being members of the household of God.

We can certainly see a number of highly recognized personalities on the religious scene today, and much is made of their wisdom and their “take” on important national and even international issues facing our nation. We should not be moved or impressed by thousand dollar suits or fancy haircuts, or impressive auditoriums.

Paul’s point is really quite simple. Christ is always relevant. One doesn’t need fine oratory, or be recognized as a famous person to advance the gospel. One needs the gospel in plain and simple language just as it has been given to us by the Lord. “Christ crucified” is the message that saves. “Christ crucified” is the only message that can bring the conscience true peace, peace with God that assures us of eternal life.

Proclaiming this message is our calling here at St. Paul’s. The Lord has entrusted us with this message that we might share it with those around us in our community, beginning with our own friends and family. That is the business we are to be about, and seriously undertake with zeal and energy.

This is our Epiphany message. Epiphany means a revealing. Can we open our eyes and see what the Lord has put in front of us? Yes, it starts with us really seeing the wonder of Christ’s glory, and taking that into our hearts. You’re not doing that if you are spiritually half asleep, or if church is simply a good thing to do. You see, when we by the Spirit’s grace and power do comprehend the majesty of the glory that is Jesus our Savior and our God, then we will be filled with the desire to do all we can to advance this

ministry and let the light of the glory of Christ shine for all the world to see.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.