

**February 5, 2017**  
**1 Corinthians 2:14-16, 3:1-9; Matthew 5:21-37**

Just in case you've forgotten, the church in Corinth had problems. They had church drama. Mad at each other and divided into cliques, they wrote to their former pastor. They thought that Paul would settle things. They thought he might return to fix their problems in person. No such luck. While Paul obviously and articulately loved these folks, he was *frustrated* with their behavior. What pastor isn't when their people misbehave?! Why couldn't they just get along?! No more choosing sides or immature, un-Christian behavior. He just wanted them to be good disciples – to live as they had been taught, and bear witness to Jesus Christ in the world.

Eugene Peterson, author of *The Message* translation of the Bible, translated this 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter a bit more candidly than the NRSV. His version of Paul's words was this:

**1** Right now, friends, I'm completely frustrated by your unspiritual dealings with each other and with God. You're acting like infants in relation to Christ, **2** capable of nothing much more than nursing at the breast. Well, then, I'll nurse you since you don't seem capable of anything more. **3** As long as you grab for what makes you feel good or makes you look important, are you really much different than a babe at the breast, content only when everything's going your way? **4** When one of you says, "I'm on Paul's side," and another says, "I'm for Apollos," aren't you being totally infantile? **5** Who do you think Paul is, anyway? Or Apollos, for that matter? Servants, both of us - servants who waited on you as you gradually learned to entrust your lives to our mutual Master. We each carried out our servant assignment. **6** I planted the seed, Apollos watered the plants, but God made you grow. **7** It's not the one who plants or the one who waters who is at the center of this process but God, who makes things grow. **8** Planting and watering are

menial servant jobs at minimum wages. **9** What makes them worth doing is the God we are serving. You happen to be God's field in which we are working.

Regardless of who you are or what is at stake, church drama is painful. Every church has it. I've never known a congregation to be completely drama free. Whether it's about new carpet colors or money management or personality differences, church drama is exhausting for everybody. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that *their* drama -- their "jealousy" and "quarrels" -- made them just like every other human being (i.e. sinful, broken, and not good enough). "As long as there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not of the flesh, behaving according to human inclinations?" Instead, they were called to rise above the shenanigans and live as God's holy people. In the world, but not of the world.

For, the arguments and jealousy and divisiveness in the Corinthians community were diametrically opposed to the genuine fruits of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, kindness, gentleness, self-control... These are the gifts God offered the church. These are the values that Paul instilled in the church. Bearing anything other than this holy fruit, acting unlike these Spirit-ual behaviors, marked them as unspiritual people who were immature. Infantile. Not ready for the solid food of serious Christian faith and praxis.

Paul wrote that they didn't get it. They couldn't look beyond themselves. "Are you only content when everything is going your way? When you claim to be only on Paul's side or Apollos's side, aren't you being childish?" As Eugene Peterson translated Paul's words, the church members in Corinth behaved in ways that only meant to please themselves, when instead they should have spent their time and energy pleasing God.

Instead of picking a human leader to follow, they should have picked Jesus Christ.

Instead of behaving in predictably flawed human ways, they should have taken their faith seriously and lived into Christ's teachings.

For long-term members at Sweet Hollow, this passage explicitly speaks to those who choose one of your previous pastors to be your *forever* pastor instead of investing in the community God called here now. That's not good enough. The passage speaks to people who only want to be church with a particular group of people. That's not good enough. If you only come to Sweet Hollow for the social component, **if** you leave complaining about the hymn or the prayer or the way we prayed in worship because it wasn't what you liked, **if** you stand in the parking lot trying to get people on your side of the argument, or withhold your offering because of something someone said or did, that's not good enough. That is not what the church is called to do or be. Living for Christ, living into Christ takes our own preferences out of the equation. Our being is part of the larger body of Christ, called to something much bigger than what any one of us understand or desire. We are called to share the same mind as Christ, not what other people or groups or ideas espouse. We are called to bear good fruit, not "good enough" fruit.

This matters because it affects both how we are Christians individually and collectively, and how we are community together. Who has authority to guide us in what is right and wrong? How will we discern what God is calling us to do? Will we know the right thing because it is what we want or like? Will we stick with the community even when it is difficult and dramatic? Are we willing to be menial laborers in God's field? Do

we trust that God is growing us to be something in God's own time and in God's own way?

At the end of this passage, Paul used the Greek word *synergoi* (which is the base for the English word for "synergy"). We are called to have synergy with God -- to grow something bigger and better than what we could do on our own. We are God's co-workers. And because God has this collegial relationship with each of us individually, it also puts us on the same team, working together with the same purpose. We are all farmhands in God's field. Working side by side as we bend and sweat and pull together for the glory of God. God is working his purpose out, while we tend the life given us.

Ultimately, this is another invitation to stewardship. This is another opportunity to examine the gifts God has given us, and consider how we are using those gifts. The gift of community and opportunities for service and faithful leadership and time and talents... "With God all things are possible..." Even the growth of stubborn seeds in rocky soil. "With God all things are possible..." Even the unity of the body of Christ. "With God all things are possible..." Thanks be to God!